

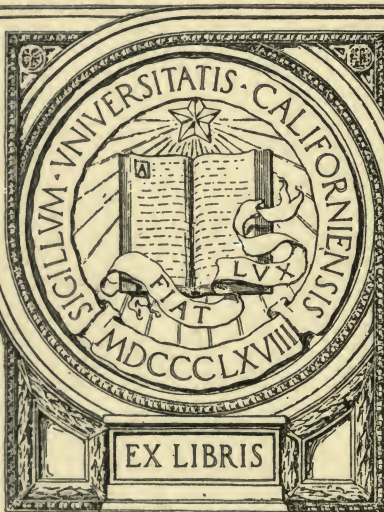
OLD MADAME
AND OTHER
TRAGEDIES



HARRIET
PRESCOTT
SPOFFORD

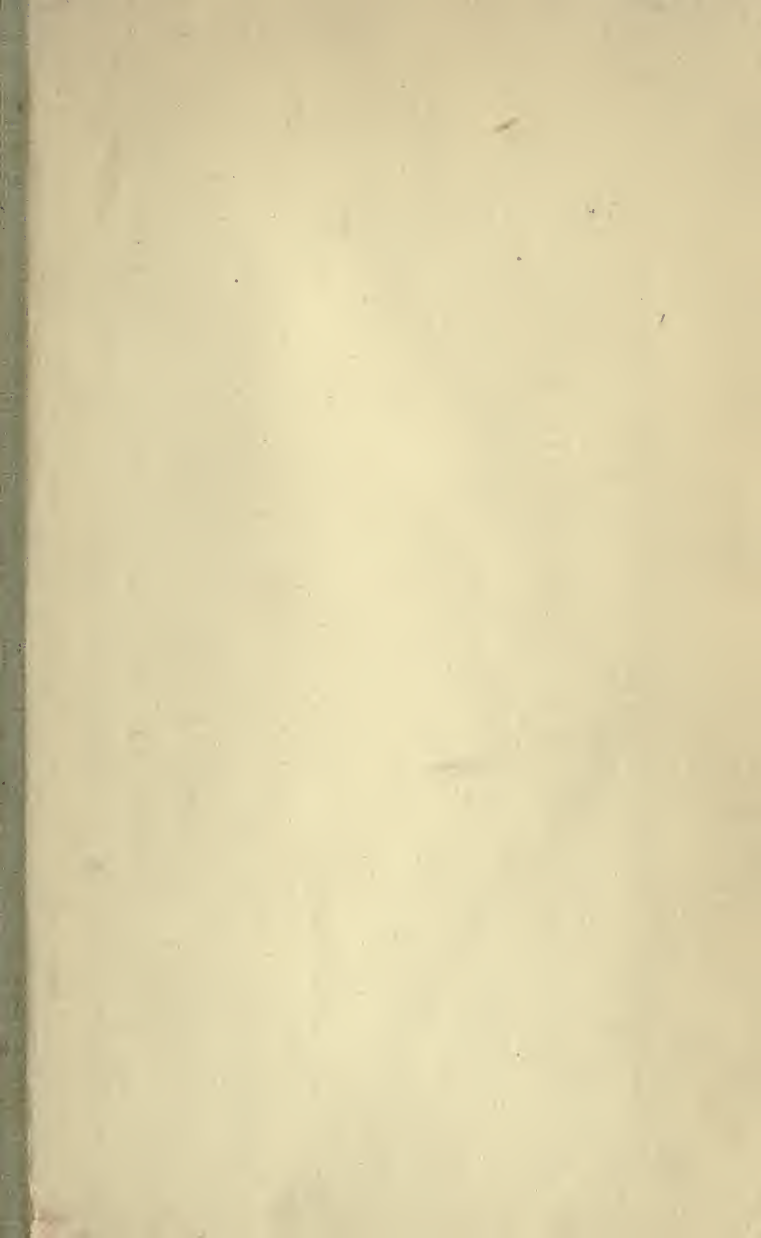


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Other Tragedies

OLD MADAME

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BY

HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD

AUTHOR OF *An Inheritance*, *A Master Spirit*,
The Scarlet Poppy, ETC.

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Old Madame

Old Madame



MISS BARBARA! Barbara, honey! Where's this you're hiding at?" cried old Phillis, tying her bandana head-gear in a more flamboyant knot over her gray hair and brown face. "Where's this you're hiding at? The Old Madame's after you."

And in answer to the summons, a girl clad in homespun, but with every line of her figure the lines, one might fancy, of a wood-and-water nymph's, came slowly up from the shore and the fishing-smacks, with a young fisherman beside her.

Down on the margin, the men were hauling a seine and singing as they hauled; a drogher was dropping its dark sails; bare-footed urchins were wading in the breaking roller where the boat that the men were

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launching dipped up and down; women walked with baskets poised lightly on their heads, calling gayly to one another; sands were sparkling, sails were glancing, winds were blowing, waves were curling, voices were singing and laughing,—it was all the scene of a happy, sunshiny, summer morning in the little fishing-hamlet of an island off the coast.

The girl and her companion wound up the stony path, passing Phillis, and paused before a low stone house that seemed only a big boulder itself, in whose narrow, open hallway, stretching from door to door, leaned a stately old woman on her staff,—a background of the sea rising behind her.

“Did you wish for Barbara, Old Madame?” asked the fisherman, as superb a piece of rude youth and strength as any young Viking.

She fixed him with her glance an instant.

“And you are his grandson?” said the old woman. “You are called by his name—the fourth of the name—Ben Benvoisie. I am not dreaming? You are sure of it?”

"As sure as that you are called Old Madame," he replied, with a grave pride of self-respect, and an air of something solemn in his joy, as if he had but just turned from looking on death to embrace life.

"As sure as that I am called Old Madame," she repeated. "Barbara, come here. As sure as that I am called Old Madame."

But she had not always been Old Madame. A woman not far from ninety now, tall and unbent, with her great black eyes, glowing like stars in sunken wells, from her face scarred with the script of sorrow — a proud beggar, preserving in her little coffer only the money that one day should bury her with her haughty kindred — once she was the beautiful Elizabeth Champer-noune, the child of noble ancestry, the heir-ess of unbounded wealth, the last of a great house of honor.

From birth till age, nothing that surrounded her but had its relation to the family grandeur. Her estate — her grandfather's, nay, her great-grandfather's — lay on

a goodly island at the mouth of a broad river ; an island whose paltry fishing-village of to-day was, before her time, a community where also a handful of other dignitaries dwelt in only less splendor. There were one or two of the ancient fishermen and pilots yet living when she died, who, babbling of their memories, could recall out of their childhood the stately form of her father, the Judge Champernoune, as he walked abroad in his black robes, who came from over seas to marry her mother, the heiress of the hero for whom the King of France had sent — when, in the French and Indian wars, the echoes of his daring deeds rang across the water — to make him Baron Chaslesmarie, with famous grants and largesse.

And in state befitting one whom the King of France thus with his own hand exalted, had the prodigal Baron Chaslesmarie spent his days — never, however, discontinuing the vast fisheries of his father, in which he had himself made fortunes before the King had found him out. And although the title

died with him, and the pension died before him, for the King of France had, with treacherous complaisance, ceded the island to the enemy one day when war was over, yet store of land and money were left for the sole child, who became the wife of Judge Champernoune and the mother of Elizabeth.

What a sweet old spot it was in which Elizabeth's girlhood of ideal happiness went by! The house,—a many-gabled dwelling, here of wood and there of brick, with a noble hall where the original cornices and casements had been replaced by others of carved mahogany, the panels of the doors rich with their thick gilding, and the cellars three-deep for the cordials and dainties with which the old Baron Chaslesmarie had stored them,—was, a part of it, once brought from foreign shores as the great Government-house. Set in its brilliant gardens, it was a pleasant sight to see—here a broad upper gallery giving airy shelter, there a flight of stairs running from some flower-bed to some casement, with roses and honeysuckles clambering about the balustrade, avenues of

ash and sycamore leading away from it, an outer velvet turf surrounding it and ending in a boundary of mossy granite boulders. The old baron slept in his proud tomb across the bay—by the fort he had defended, the chapel he had built, in the graveyard of his people, proud as he. And Ben Benvoisie, the lad whom gossips said he had snatched from the shores of some Channel Island in one of the wild voyages of his youth, slept at his feet,—but another Ben Benvoisie lived after him. In a dimple between these boulders of the gardens' boundary, Judge Champernoune and his wife and his other child were laid away. There was always something sadly romantic to Elizabeth in the thought of her father walking over the island from time to time, and selecting this spot for his eternal rest, where the rocky walls enclosed him, the snows of winter and the bramble-roses of summer covered him, and the waves, not far remote, sang his long lullaby.

By the time that Elizabeth inherited the place, the importance of the island town had

gone up the river to a spot on the mainland, and one by one the great families had followed, the old judge buying the land of them as they went, and their houses, dismembered, with fire and with decay, of a wing here and a gable there, and keeping but little trace of them. The judge had no thought of leaving; and the people would have felt as if the hand of Providence had been withdrawn had he done so. Nor had Elizabeth any thought of it, when she came to reign in her father's stead and infuse new life into the business of her ancestors, that had continued, as it were, by its own momentum, since, although Judge Champernoune had not thought it beneath his judicial dignity to carry it on as he found it, yet, owing to his other duties, he had not given it that personal attention it had in the vigor and impetus of the Chaslesmaries. She had not a memory that did not belong to the place. Certain sunbeams that she recalled slanting down the warehouses rich with the odors of spices and sugar, through which she had wandered as a child, were living things to her; a foggy

morning, when an unseen fruiter in the sea-mist made all the air of the island port delicious as some tropical grove, with its cargo of lemons, seemed like a journey to the ends of the earth. And the place itself was her demesne, she its acknowledged *châtelaine*; there was not a woman in the town who had not served in her mother's kitchen or hall; it was in her fishing-smacks the men went out to sea, in her brigs they ran down to the West Indian waters and over to the Mediterranean ports — perhaps, alas, the African; it was her warehouses they filled with goods from far countries, which her agents scattered over the land — for a commerce that had begun with the supplying of the fishing-fleets, had swelled into a great foreign trade. And their homes were all that she could make them in their degree; their children she herself attended in sudden illness, having been reared, as her mother was before her, in the homely surgery and herb-craft proper to those that had others in their charge; and many a stormy night, in later years, did the good Dame Elizabeth leave her own children

in their downy nests, and hasten to ease some child going out of the world on the horrible hoarse breath of croup, or to bring other children into the world in scorn of doctors three miles off.

She was twenty-five when the step-son of her father's sister, her cousin by marriage but not by blood, appeared to fulfil the agreement of their parents, to take effect when he should finish his travels — which, indeed, he had been in no haste to end. She had not been without suitors, of high and low degree. Had not the heir of the Canadian governor spoken of a treaty for the hand of this fair princess? Was it not Ben Benvoisie, the bold young master of a fishing-smack, with whom she had played when a child, who once would have carried her off to sea like any Norse pirate, and who had dared to leave his kiss red on her lips? Had Elizabeth been guilty of thinking that, had she been a river-pilot's daughter, such kisses would not come amiss?

Yet long ago had she understood that she was pledged to her Cousin Louis, and she

waited for his coming. His eyes were as blue as hers were brown, his hair as black as hers was red, his features as Greek as hers were Norman, his stature as commanding as her own.

“Oh, he was a beauty, my Cousin Louis was!” she used to say.

She never called him her lover, nor her husband—he was always her Cousin Louis.

“So you have come, sir,” she said, when he stepped ashore, and crossed the street and met her at the gate, and would have kissed her brow. “More slowly, sir,” she said, drawing back. “You have come to win, not to wear. Elizabeth Charlesmarie Champer-noune is not a ribbon or a rose, to be tossed aside and picked up at will.”

“By the Lord!” cried Cousin Louis. “If I had dreamed she were the rose she is, the salt seas would not have been running all these years between me and her sweetness—and her thorns.”

“This is no court, and these no court-ladies, Cousin Louis,” she replied. “We are plain people, used only to plain speeches.”

“Plain, indeed,” said Cousin Louis. “Only Helen of Troy was plainer!”

“Nor do flattering words,” she said, “well befit those whose slow coming flatters ill.”

But the smile with which she uttered her somewhat bitter speech was of enchanting good-humor, and Cousin Louis thought his lines had fallen in pleasant places.

He was not so sure of it when a month had passed, and the same smile sweetened an icy manner still, and he had not yet been able, in the rush of guests that surrounded her, to have a word alone with Elizabeth. He saw that jackanapes of a young West Indian planter bring the color to her cheek with his whispered word. He saw her stroll down between the sycamores, unattended by any save Captain Wentworth. But let him strive to gain her ear and one of the young officers from Fort Charlesmarie was sure to intercept him,—strive to attend her walk, and Dorothy and Jean and Margaret and Belle seemed to spring from the ground to her side. From smiling he changed to sullen, and from sullen to savage—to abuse his

folly, to abuse her coquetry, to wonder if he cared enough for the winning of her to endure these indignities, and all at once to discover that this month had taught him there was but one woman in the world for him, and all the rest were shadows. One woman in the world,—and without her, life was so incomplete, himself so halved, that death would be the better portion.

How then? What to do? Patience gave up the siege. He was thinking of desperate measures on the day when, moping around the shores alone in a boat, he espied them riding from the Beacon Hill down upon the broad ferry-boat that crossed the shallow inlet. How his heart knocked his sides as he saw that pale, dark West Indian, with his purple velvet corduroys, and his nankeen jacket and jockey-cap, riding down beside her,—as he saw Wentworth spring from the stirrup to offer a palm for her foot when they reached the door! But Cousin Louis had not waited for that; he had put some strength to his strokes and was at the door before him, was at her side before him,

compelling his withdrawal, offering no palm to tread on, but reaching up and grasping her waist with his two hands.

"By heaven!" he murmured then, as Wentworth was beyond hearing, his eyes blazing on hers. "What man do you think will endure this? What man will suffer this suspense in which you keep me?"

"It is you, Cousin Louis, who are keeping me in suspense," she answered, as she hung above him there.

And was there anything in her arch tone that gave him hope? He released her then, but when an hour later he met her again, "Very well," he said, in the suppressed key of his passion. "I will keep you in the suspense you spoke of no more. You will marry me this day, or not at all. By my soul, I will wait no longer for my answer!"

"You have never asked me, sir, before," she said. "How could you have an answer? I hardly know if you have asked me now."

But, that sunset, with Belle and Margaret and Jean and Dorothy, she strolled down to the little church, that by some hidden pass-

word was half-filled with the fishing-people and her servants. And when she came back, she was leaning on Cousin Louis's arm very differently from her usual habit, and the girls were going on before.

"If I had known this Cossack fashion was the way to win," Cousin Louis was saying — when a scream from Margaret and Belle and Dorothy and Jean rang back to them, and, hurrying forward, they found the girls with their outcry between two drawn swords, for Wentworth and the West Indian had come down into the moonlit glade to finish a sudden quarrel that had arisen over their wine, as to the preference of the fair *châtelaine*.

"Put up your swords, gentlemen," said Cousin Louis, with his proud, happy smile, "unless you wish to measure them with mine. It would be folly to fight about nothing. And there is no such person as Elizabeth Champernounge."

The men turned white in the moonlight to see the lovely creature standing there, and before they had time for anger or amazement, Elizabeth said after him:

“There is no such person as Elizabeth Champernour. She married, an hour ago, her Cousin Louis.”

Ah me, that all these passions now should be but idle air! Perhaps the hearts of the gallants swelled and sank and swelled again, as they looked at her, beautiful, rosy and glowing, in the broad white beam that bathed her. They put up their swords, and went to the house and drank her health and were rowed away.

Elizabeth and Cousin Louis settled down to their long life of promised happiness, in the hospitality of an open hearth around which friends and children clustered, blest, it seemed, by fortune and by fate. Gay parties came and went from the town above, from larger and more distant towns, from the village and port across the bay. Life was all one long, sweet holiday. What pride and joy was theirs when the son Charlesmarie was born; what tender bliss Elizabeth's when the velvet face of the little Louise first lay beneath her own and she sank away with her into a land of downy dreams, conscious only of the wings of love

hovering over her! How, at once, as child after child came, they seemed to turn into water-nixies, taking to the sea as naturally as the gulls flying around the cliffs! How each loiterer in the village would make the children his own, teaching them every prank of the waves, taking them in boats far beyond the outer light, bringing them through the breakers after dark, wrapped in great pilot-coats and drenched with foam! She never knew what was fear for her five boys, the foster-brothers of all the other children in the village. Only the little maiden Louise, pale as the rose that grew beneath the oriel, she kept under her eye as she might, bringing her up in fine household arts and delicate accomplishments,—ignorant of the shadow of Ben Benvoisie stalking so close behind as to darken all her work.

Her husband had taken the great business that Elizabeth's people had so long carried on through their glories and titles, their soldiery and war, their other pursuits if they had them; his warehouses lined the shores; the offing was full of his ships; he owned

almost the last rod of land on the island, and much along the main. He did not pretend to maintain the state of the old baron; but to be a guest at Chaslesmarie was to live a charmed life awhile. He was a man of singular uprightness; as he grew older apt to bursts of anger, yet to Elizabeth and to his household he was gentleness itself; some men trembled at the sound of his voice, but children never did. If he was not so beloved as his wife by the fishing-people, it was because he was not recognized master as of right, and because he exacted his due, although tossing it in the lap of the next needy one. But he was a person with whom no other took a liberty. "A king among men, was my Cousin Louis," Old Madame used to say, and sigh and sigh and sigh again as she said it.

But the hospitality of the island was not all that of pleasure and sumptuous ease. It was a place easily reached by sail from one or more of the great towns, by boat from the town above; and in the stirring and muttering of political discontent, the gentlemen who appeared and disappeared at all hours of the

day, and as often by night, folded in cloaks wet with the salt sea spray, wore spurs at their heels and swords at their sides to some purpose. And when at last war came— Horror of horrors, what was this! Cousin Louis and his island had renounced allegiance to the crown, and had taken the side of the colonial rebels and the Continental Congress.

“We!” cried Elizabeth, who knew little of such things, and had a vague idea that they owed fealty still to that throne at whose foot her grandfather had knelt. “We, whom the King of France ennobled and enriched!”

“And for that price were we sold ere we were born, and do we stay slaves handed about from one ruler to another?” her husband answered her. “We have ennobled and enriched ourselves. We have twice and thrice repaid the kings of France in tribute money. Soon shall the kings of France go the way of all the world—may the kings of Britain follow them! Henceforth, the people put on the crown. I believe in the rights of man. I live under no tyranny—but yours,” he said gayly.

“A Chaslesmarie ! A Champernounge !” Elizabeth was saying to herself, heedless of his smile.

“We are an insignificant islet,” her husband urged. “The kings of France have betrayed us. The kings of Britain have oppressed us. We renounce the one. We defy the other !” And he ran the flag under which the rebels fought, up the staff at Chaslesmarie, and it was to be seen at the peak of all his brigantines and sloops that, leaving their legitimate affairs, armed themselves and scoured the seas, and brought their prizes into port. But freely as this wealth came in, as freely it went out ; for Cousin Louis did nothing by the halves. And heart and soul being in the matter, it is safe to say that not one guinea of the gold his sailors brought him in, during that long struggle, remained to him at its close.

It was during this struggle that, when one day the sloop “Adder’s-tongue” sailed, the elder son of Ben Benvoisie—who had long since married a fisherman’s daughter—was found on board, a stowaway. Great was Ben Benvoisie’s wrath when he missed his

son ; but there was nothing to be done. He rejected Cousin Louis' regrets with scorn. But when the sloop brought in her prizes, and the first man ashore told him his son had died of some ailment before he sighted an enemy, then his rage rose in a flame, he towered like an angry god, and standing on the head of the wharf, in the presence of all the people, he cursed Cousin Louis, root and branch, at home and abroad, — a black cloud full of bursting lightnings rising behind him as he spoke, as if he had a confederate in evil powers,—cursed him in wild and stinging words that made the blood run cold, that cut Cousin Louis to the heart, that, when they were repeated to her, made even Elizabeth turn faint and sick. “There is a strange second-sight with those Benvoisies,” she said. “God grant his curses come to naught.” But she seldom saw him at a distance without an instant's prayer, and she knew that the fishing-people always after that sight of him, standing there at the head of the wharf, with his blazing eyes and streaming hair, and the rain and

the lightning and thunder volleying around him, held some superstitions of their own regarding the evil eye of the Benvoisies, and kept silent watch to see what would come of it all.

But the war at last was ended, the world was trying to regain its equilibrium, and continental money was at hand on every side, and little other. Cousin Louis, who had faith in the new republic, believed with an equally hot head in its own good faith, and sent word far and near that he would redeem the current paper, dollar for dollar in gold. And he did so. There were barrels of it in his warehouse garrets, and his grandchildren had it to play with. "It is Ben Benvoisie's word," said Elizabeth, when they saw the mistake. But Cousin Louis laughed and kissed her, and said it had sunk treasure, to be sure, but asked if Ben Benvoisie's word was to outweigh his fisheries and fleets and warehouses and hay-lands—his splendid boys, his girl Louise! And he caught the shrinking, slender creature to his heart as he spoke—this lovely young

Louise, as fair and fragile as a lily on its stem, whom he loved as he loved his life, his flower-girl, as he called her, just blossoming into girlhood, with the pale rose-tint on her cheek, and her eyes like the bee-larkspur. How was he, absorbed in his counting-room, forgetful at his dinner-table, taking his pleasures with guests, with gayeties, to know that his slip of a girl, not yet sixteen, met a handsome hazel-eyed lad at the foot of the long garden every night,—Ben Benvoisie the third,—and had promised to go with him, his wife, in boy's clothes, whenever the fruiter was ready for sea again! But old Ben Benvoisie knew it. And he could not forbear his savage jeer. And the end was that Cousin Louis, at the foot of the long garden one night, put a bullet through young Ben Benvoisie's arm, and carried off his fainting girl to her room that she showed no wish to leave again. "She will die," said Cousin Louis, one day toward the year's close, "if we do not give way."

"She would better," said Elizabeth, who knew what the misery of her child's marriage

with old Ben Benvoisie's son must needs be when the first glamour of young passion should be over.

And she did. And Cousin Louis' heart went down into the grave with her.

"It is not only old Ben Benvoisie's word," said Elizabeth. "It is his hand."

Her secret tears were bitter for the child, but not so bitter as they would have been had she first passed into old Ben Benvoisie's power, and been made the instrument for humbling the pride and breaking the heart daily of her brothers Chaslesmarie and Champernoune, and of the hated owner of the "Adder's-tongue," had she lived to smart and suffer under the difference between the rude race reared in a fishing-hut, and that reared in the mansion of her ancestors. Perhaps Old Madame never saw the thing fairly; it always seemed to her that Louise died of some disease incident to childhood. "I have my boys left," said Elizabeth. "And no one can disturb my little grave."

It was two graves the second year after. For Chaslesmarie, her first-born and her dar-

ling, whose baby kisses had been sweeter than her lover's, the life in whose little limbs and whose delicious flesh had been dearer than her own, his bright head now brighter for the fresh laurels of Harvard,—Charles-marie, riding down from the Beacon Hill, where he had gone to see the fishing-fleet make sail, was thrown from his horse, and did not live long enough to tell who was the man starting from the covert of bayberry-bushes. But Elizabeth carried a stout heart and a high head. She could not, if she would, have bent as Cousin Louis did, nor did the proud serenity leave her eye, although his darkened with a sadness never lightened. None knew her pangs, nor saw the tears that stained her pillow in the night; she would, if she could, have hid her suffering from herself. She began to feel a terrible assurance that she was fighting fate;—but she would make a hard fight of it. Conscious of her integrity of purpose, of the justice of her claims, of her right to the children she had borne, there was something in her of the spirit of the ancients who

dared, if not defy the gods, yet accept the combat offered by them. Champernoune was the heir instead, that was all. Then there were the twin boys, Max and Rex, two lawless young souls; and the youngest of all, St. Jean, whose head always wore a halo in Elizabeth's eyes. With these, why should she grieve? Now she was also the mother of angels!

Again, after a while, the frequent festivities filled the house, and the great gold and silver plate glittered in the dark dining-room and filled it, at every touch, with melodious and tremulous vibrations. Now the Legislature of the State, one and all, attended a grand banqueting there, now the Governor and his Council; now navy-yard and fort and town, and far-off towns, came to the balls that did not end even with the bright outdoor breakfast, but ran into the next night's dancing, and a whole week's gayety. Now it was boating and bathing in the creeks; now it was sailing out beyond the last lights with music and flowers and cheer; and all the time it was splendor and sumptuousness

and life at the breaking crest. And Elizabeth led the dance, the stateliest of the stately, the most beautiful still of the beautiful. And if sometimes she saw old Ben Benvoisie's eyes, as he leaned over the gate and looked at her a moment within the gardens and among her roses, it was not to shudder at them. What possessed Elizabeth in those days? She only felt that the currents of her blood must sweep along in this mad way, or the heart would stop.

Then came Champernounge's wedding,—he and that friend whom the chief magistrate of the land delighted to honor, marrying sisters in one night. How lovely, how gracious, how young the bride! Was it at Gonaives that year that she died dancing? Was it at Gonaives that the yellow-fever buried Champernounge in the common trench?

Elizabeth was coming up the landing from the boat, her little negro dwarf carrying her baskets, when the news reached her quick senses, as the one that spoke it meant it should. She staggered and fell. The doctors

came to bind up the broken bones, and only when they said, "At last it is quite right; but, dear lady, your dancing days are over," did any see her tears. She had buried her only girl, her first-born boy, her married heir, without great signs of sorrow. She had plunged into a burning house in the village once, gathering her gauzy skirts about her, to bring out the little Louise whom an unfaithful nurse had taken there and forsaken in her fright. She had waded, torch in hand, into the wildly rolling surf of a starless night to clutch the bow of Chaslesmarie's boat that was sweeping helplessly to the breaker with the unskilled child at the helm. She had shut herself up with Champernoune, when Ben Benvoisie brought back the small-pox to the village, and had suffered no one to minister to him but herself. And when the dog all thought mad tore Cousin Louis' arm, she herself had sucked the poison from the wound.

Yet with that sentence, that absurd little sentence, that her dancing days were over, it seemed all at once to Elizabeth that every-

thing else was over, too. With Champer-noune now everything else had gone — state and splendor, peace and pleasure, hospitality and home and hearth, and all the rest. All things had been possible to her, the mastery of her inner joy itself in one form or another, while she held her forces under her. But now she herself was stricken, and who was to fight for them? Who, when the stars in their courses fought against Sisera!

But as wild as the grief of Cousin Louis was, hers was as still, though there were ashes on her heart. She went about with a cane when she got up, unable to step a minuet or bend a knee in prayer. “But see,” cried old Ben Benvoisie to himself, “her head is just as high!”

Not so with Cousin Louis. He sat in his counting-room, his face bent on his hands half the time. Cargoes came in unheeded, reports were made him unregarded, ships lay at the wharf unloaded, the state of the market did not concern him — nothing seemed of any matter but those three graves. Then he roused himself to a spasmodic activity,

gave orders here and orders there, but his mind was elsewhere. With the striking of the year's balance he had made bad bargains, taken bad debts, sent out bad men with his fleets, brought in his fares and his fruits and foreign goods at a bad season, lost the labor of years. A fire had reduced a great property elsewhere to ashes; a storm had scattered and destroyed his southern ships. "Something must be done," said Cousin Louis. And he looked back from his counting-room, on the fair mansion from whose windows he had so long heard song and laughter floating, with its gardens round about it, where the sweet-briar and the tall white rose climbed and looked down at the red rose blushing at their feet, where the honeysuckles shed their fragrance, where the great butterflies waved their wings over all the sweet old-fashioned flowers that had been brought from the gardens of France and summer after summer had bloomed and spiced the air, where the golden robins flashed from bough to bough of the lane of plum-trees, and the sunshine lay vivid on the encircling velvet verdure.

“Her home, and the home of her people for a century behind her — the people whose blood in her veins went to make her what she is — noblest woman, sweetest wife, that ever made a man’s delight. The purest, proudest, loftiest soul that looks heaven in the face. O God, bless her, my dear wife — dearer than when I wooed you or when I wedded you, by all the long increase of years ! Something must be done,” said Cousin Louis, “or that will go with the rest.”

Perhaps Cousin Louis began to forefeel the future then. Certainly, as a little time passed on, an unused timidity overwhelmed him. Against Elizabeth’s advice he began to call in various moneys from here and there where they were gathering more to themselves. “There is to be another war with the British,” he said. “We must look to our fortunes.” But he would not have any interference with their way of life, the way Elizabeth had always lived. There must still be the dinner to the judges, the supper to the clergy, the frequent teas to the ladies of the fort, the midsummer throng of young people, the

house full for the Christmas holidays ; Max and Rex were to be thought of, St. Jean was not to grow up remembering a house of mourning. Why had no one told them that, in all the festive season before Champer-noune's death, the younger boys not being held then to strict account, old Ben Benvoisie, sitting with them on the sea-beaten rocks, had fired their fancy with stories of the wild sea-life that had blanched his hair and furrowed his face before the time? One day St. Jean came in to break the news: Max and Rex had run away to sea. "I should have liked to go," said St. Jean, "but I could not leave my mother so."

"By the gods!" said his father. "You shall go master of the best ship I have!" And in due time he sent him supercargo to the East, that he might learn all that a lad who had tumbled about among ropes and blocks and waves and rocks, ever since his birth, did not already know. But he forbade his wife to repeat to him the names of Rex and Max; nor would they ever again have been mentioned in his presence but for

the report of a ship that had spoken the craft they took, and learned that it had been overhauled, and Max, of whom nothing more was ever heard, pressed into the British service, and Rex, ordered aloft on a stormy night, had fallen from the yard into the sea, and his grave was rolled between two waves.

As Elizabeth came home from the little church—the first time she went out after this—thinking, as she went, of the twilight when she found Champernoune, who had stolen from the lightsome scenes that greeted him and his young bride, to stand a little while beside the grave where his brother Charlesmarie slept—she met old Ben Benvoisie.

“Well,” he said, “you know how good it is yourself.”

“Is not the curse fulfilled, Ben Benvoisie?” she demanded. “Are you going to spare me none?”

“None,” said Ben Benvoisie.

The servants were running toward her when she reached the house. The master

had a stroke. A stroke indeed. He sat in his chair a year, head and face white, speaking of nothing but his children's graves, they thought. "Too cold — too damp. Why did I bury there?" he murmured. "I will go have them up," he said. "Oh, why did I bury so deep — cold — cold — Elizabeth!" But when Elizabeth answered him, the thing he would say had gone, and when he died at last, for all his struggle for speech, it was still unspoken.

Ah, what a year was that when the long strain was over, and she placed him where she was to lie herself, at her father's feet! Things went on as they would that year. Wrapped in an ashen apathy, Elizabeth hardly knew she breathed, and living less at that time in this world than the other, the things of this world had small concern for her. Born, too, and reared in wealth, she could as easily have understood that there was any other atmosphere about her as any other condition; and the rogues, then, had it all their own way. Suits for western lands that were the territorial possessions of princes

were compromised for sums she never saw; blocks of city houses were sold for taxes; heaven knows what else was done, what rights were signed away on papers brought for her name as administratrix. And when St. Jean came home from sea, where were the various moneys that his father had been calling in for so long a time? There was not a penny of them accounted for.

St. Jean was a man before his time. He looked about him. The great business had gone to the dogs, and some of the clerks and factors had gone with it; at least, they too had disappeared. Other men, in other places, had taken advantage of the lapse, established other houses, opened other fisheries, stolen their markets. There was not enough of either fleet left in condition to weather a gale. "It has all been at the top of the wave," said St. Jean, "and now we are in the trough of the sea." But he had his ship, the "Great-heart," and with that he set about redeeming his fortunes. And his first step was to bring home to his mother a daughter-in-law as proud as she—Hope,

the orphan of a West Indian prelate, with no fortune but her face, and with manners that Elizabeth thought unbecoming so penniless a woman.

When St. Jean went away to sea again, he established his wife—Little Madame, the people had styled her—in a home of her own. For large as the Mansion was, it was not large enough to hold those two women: a home in a long low stone house that belonged to the estate and had once been two or three houses together,—at which one looked twice, you might say, to see if it were dwelling or boulder,—and which he renovated and then filled with some of the spare pictures and furnishings of the Mansion-house. And there Hope lived, cheered Elizabeth as she could, and cared for the children that came to her. And how many came! And Elizabeth, who could never feel that Hope had quite the right to a place as her rival in St. Jean's affections, took these little children to her heart, if she could not yet altogether take their mother; and they filled for her many

a weary hour of St. Jean's absences on his long voyages,—St. Jean who, in some miraculous way, now represented to her father and husband and son.

Elizabeth had time enough for the little people; for friends did not disturb her much after the first visits of condolence. Trouble had come to many of them, as well. Dorothy and Margaret and Belle and Jean, and their compeers, were scattered and dead and absorbed and forgetful, and she summoned none of them about her any more with music and feasting. Of all her wealth now nothing remained but a part of the land on the island and the adjoining main, with its slight and fickle revenue. Of all her concourse of servants there were only Phillis and Scip, who would have thought themselves transferred to some other world had they left Old Madame.

But the Mansion of Chaslemarie was a place of pleasure to the children still, at any rate; and the little swarm spent many an hour in the old box-bordered garden, where the stately lady walked on Phillis's arm, and

in the great hall where she told them the history of each of the personages of the tall portraits, from that of the fierce old Chaslesmarie of all down to the angel-faced child St. Jean; told them, not as firing pride with memories of ancient pride, but as storied incidents of family life; and as she told them she lived over her share in them, and place and race and memories seemed only a part of herself.

“Madame,” said St. Jean once, when at home,—no child of hers had often called her mother,—“I think if we sold the place and moved away we would do well. The soil is used up, the race is run out—if we transplanted and made new stock? Here is no chance to educate the children or to rebuild our fortunes now. Somewhere else, it may be, I could put myself in better business connection —”

The gaze of his mother’s burning black eyes bade him to silence. She felt as if in that moment he had forsworn his ancestors.

“Leave this place of whose dust we are made!” she cried. “Or is it made of the

dust of the Chaslesmaries? And how short-sighted — here, where, at least, we reign! Never shall we leave it! See, St. Jean, it is all yours,” — and from command her voice took on entreaty, and how could St. Jean resist the pleading mother! He went away to sea again, and left all as before.

But the earth had moved to Elizabeth with just one thrill and tremor. The idea, the possibility, of leaving the place into which every fibre of her being was wrought had shaken her. It was a sort of conscious death into whose blackness she looked for one moment — so one might feel about to lose identity. She walked through the rooms with their quaint and rich furnishing, sombre and heavy, their gilded panels, their carved wainscot, the old French portraits of her people that looked down on her and seemed to claim her; she paused in the oriel of the yellow drawing-room, where it always seemed like a sunshiny afternoon in an October beech-wood — paused, and looked across the bay.

There gleamed the battlements of the

fort that her grandfather, the baron, had built; there was the church below, there was the tomb, among the graves of those whose powers had come to their flower in him; the grassy knoll, beyond, gleamed in the gold of the slant sun and reminded her of the days when, a child, she used to watch the last glint on the low swells of the graves, across the blue waters of the bay whose rocky islets rose red with the rust of the tides. Far out, the seas were breaking in a white line over the low red ledge, and, farther still, the lighthouse on the dim old Wrecker's Reef was kindling its spark to answer the light on the head of Charlesmarie that her grandfather had first hung in the air. Close at hand, a boat made in, piled high at either end with the brown sea-weed, the fishing-sails were flitting here and there, as there had never been a day when they were not; and the whole, bathed with the deepening sunset glow, glittered in peace and beauty. There had not been ten days in all her life when she had not looked upon the scene. No, no, no! As well give up

life itself, for this was all there was of life to her. There was the shore where, when a child, she found the bed of garnets that the next tide washed away. Here could she just remember having seen the glorious old Baron Chaslesmarie, with his men-at-arms about him. Here had her dear father proudly walked, with his air of inflexible justice, and the wind had seized his black robes and swept them about her, running at his side. Here had her mother died. Here had she first seen the superb patrician beauty of her husband's face when he came from France, with his head full of Jean Jacques and the rights of man. Here was the little chapel where they married, the linden avenue up which they strolled, with the branches shaking out fragrance and star-beams together above them — the first hour, the first delightful hour, they ever were alone together, she and her cousin Louis. Oh, here had been her life with him — a husband tenderer than a lover, a man whose loftiness lifted his race and taught her how upright other men might be, a soul so pure that the

light of God seemed to shine through it upon her! Here had been her joys, here had been her sorrows; here had she put her love away and heard the moulds ring down on that dear head; here had the world darkened to her, here should it darken to her forever when all the shadows of the grave lengthened around her. Father and mother, husband and child, race and land, they were all in this spot. These people, all of whom she knew by name, were they not like her own? Could the warmth of the blood bring much nearer to her these faces that had surrounded her since time begun — these men and women whose lives she had ordered, whose children had been fostered with her children, who half-worshipped her in her girlhood, who half-worshipped her still as Old Madame? Could she leave them? Not though St. Jean's "Great-heart" went down, — St. Jean's ship for which Hope on her house-top sat so long watching. "I refuse to think of it," she said. "It is infinitely tiresome." And then the children trooped in and stopped further soliloquy; and she

let them dress themselves out in her stiff old brocades that had been sent for just after she married and had never needed to be renewed,—the cloth-of-silver and peach-bloom, the flowered Venetian, the gold-shot white paduasoy; she liked to see the pretty Barbara and Helena and Bess prancing about the shining floors, holding up the long draperies, and she would have decked them out in her old silver-set jewels, too, had they not been parted with long since when Cousin Louis was calling in their moneys. It all renewed her youth so sweetly, if so sadly, and the mimic play in some obscure way making her feel they only played at life, relieved her of a sense of responsibility regarding their real life. When they tired of their finery, she led them down, as usual, before the portrait of this one and of that, and told over the old stories they liked to hear.

“Madame,” said little Barbara, lifting her stiff peach-blossom draperies, “why is it always ‘then,’—why is it never ‘now’?”

But the old dame’s heart did not once cry

Ichabod. To her the glory never had departed. It was as imperishable as sky and air.

It was the threatened war-time again at last; and Hope, with her sweet soft eyes watching from the house-top, saw her husband's ship come in, and with it its consort—just a day too late. The embargo had been declared, and he hailed from a forbidden port. Other sailors touched other ports and took out false papers for protection. St. Jean scorned the act. He relied on public justice: he relied on a reed. His cargoes were confiscated, and his ships were left at the wharf to rot before he could get hearing. In those two vessels was the result of his years of storm and calm, nights when the ship was heavy by the head with ice, days when her seamy sides were scorched and blistered by the sun, the best part of his life. And gone because he preferred poverty to perjury.

“Better so,” said Old Madame. “I am prouder of my penniless son than of any merchant prince with a false oath on his soul.”

And her own contentment seemed to her all that could be asked. She never thought of regretting the matter ; but she despised the General Government more than ever, and would have shown blue-lights to the enemy, had he been near and wanted a channel, were it not that he was Cousin Louis' enemy as well.

Alas ! a bitterer enemy was near. One tempestuous winter's night the minute-guns were heard off Wrecker's Reef,—and who but St. Jean must lead the rescue ? Hope, cloaked and on her house-top, with the glass saw it all ; saw St. Jean climb the reef as the moon ran out on the end of a flying scud of cloud to glance on the foam-edged roll of the black wild seas ; saw the others following along the sides of the ice-sheathed rock to carry succor to the freezing castaways, and saw, too, a plunging portion of the wreck strike one form, and hurl it headlong. It was her husband. And although he was brought back alive, yet the blow upon his breast, and the night's exposure in the icy waters, in his disheartened state, did deathly work upon

St. Jean, and he was laid low and helpless long before his release.

Then Elizabeth sold the hay-fields along the main-land to pay the bills of the doctor, who was also the druggist, to try softer air for the prostrated man, to bring him home again. She had loved to see the sun ripening the long stretch of their rich grasses with reds and purples, with russets and fresh-bursting green again, as far as eye could see. But she forgot she had ever owned them, or owning them had lost them. They were there still when she gazed that way. Then the Thierry place followed, and the little Hasard houses,—they had not yet learned how to be poor.

“There is the quarry,” said St. Jean, his heart sore as his hand was feeble. “We cannot work it now.”

“The grocer took it long ago,” said Elizabeth.

“And the Podarzhon orchard?”

“Oh, the Podarzhon orchard! Yes, your great-grandsire used to call it his pot of money. Well, the trees were old and ran

to wood,—your father renewed so many! But the apples had lost their flavor,—what apples they used to be! Oh, yes, we ate up the Podarzhon orchard some time since. And the lamb-pasture brought the children their great-coats and shoes last year. And the barley-field — How lucky that we happened to have them, my dear!”

“And I dying,” groaned St. Jean. “What, what is to become of them!”

“To become of them!” said the unfaltering spirit. “Is there question what will become of any of the blood of Chaslesmarie?”

A night came, at length, when Hope fainted in her arms — Elizabeth’s last child was dead. “A white name and a white soul,” said Elizabeth. “I thank God I knew him!” And the Geoffrey field went to bury him. “I shall be with him soon,” she said, smiling, not weeping. “Heaven can hardly be more holy than he made earth seem, he was so like a saint!” After that, she felt as if he had no more than gone on one of his long voyages. She sold the few acres of the Millet farm in a month or two;

they had nothing else to live on now but such small sales ; and from a portion of the proceeds she put aside, in a little hair-covered coffer, her grave-clothes, with the money, in crisp bank-notes, that should one day suffice to lay her away decently between her graves. And then she and Hope sat down and spent their days telling over the virtues of their dead.

It was a summer day, when the late wild-roses were just drooping on their stems and the wanton blackberry vines were everywhere putting out their arms, and all things hung a little heavily in the still air before the thunder-storm, that Elizabeth climbed alone, with her staff, to the dimple among the rocks where her dear ones lay. She paused at the top to look around her. Here swept the encircling river, with the red rocks rising from its azure ; beyond it the mainland lifted softly swelling fields that had once belonged to her ancestors of glorious memory ; far away to the south and east, over its ledges and reefs mounting purple to the bending sky, stretched the sea, its

foaming fields also once theirs and yielding them its revenues. Now,—nothing but these graves, she said; the graves of renown, of honor, of lofty purity. “No, no,” said Elizabeth aloud. “Renown, honor, purity are not buried here. St. Jean’s children cannot be robbed of that inheritance. Fire that still burns must burst through the ashes. It is fallen indeed; but with these children it shall begin its upward way again!”

“It’s upward way again,” said a deep voice. And, half-starting, she turned to see old Ben Benvoisie sitting on one of the graves below her.

“So you are satisfied at last, Ben Benvoisie,” said Elizabeth, after a moment’s gazing.

“Satisfied with what?”

“Satisfied that not one child is left to my arms, and that, when the mortgage on the Mansion falls due, not one acre of my birth-right is left to my name.”

“Do you think I did it, then, Old Madame?” asked the man, pulling his cloak about him. “Am I one of the forces of nature? You flatter me! Am I the pride,

the waste, the love of pleasure, the heedlessness of the morrow, the self-confidence of your race, that forgot there was a world outside the sound of the name of Chaslesmarie? Did I take one life away from you?" he cried, as he tottered to his stick. "Nay, once I would have given you my own! Did I take a penny of your wealth? I am as poor to-day as I was seventy years ago when I laid my life at your feet, and you laughed and scorned and spurned it, and thought so lightly of it you forgot it!"

Elizabeth was silent a little. Her hood fell back, and there streamed out a long lock of her silver hair in which still burned a gleam of gold. Her black eyes, softer than once they were, met quietly the gaze that was reading the writing of the lines cut in her face, like the lines whipped into stone by the sharp sands of the desert.

"It was not these levelling days," she said. "I was the child of nobles —"

"And I was a worm at your feet. A worm with a sting, you found. But it was not you I cursed," he cried in a hoarse pas-

sion,—“not you, Elizabeth Champernoune ! It was the master —”

“Louis and I were one,” she answered him. “We are one still. A part of him is here above the sod ; a part of me is there below it. We shall rest beside each other soon, as we did every night of forty years. Soon you, too, Ben Benvoisie, will go to your long sleep, and neither your banning nor your blessing will help or hurt the generation that is to come.”

“Will it not ? ” he said. And he laughed a low laugh half under his breath. “Yet the generations repeat themselves. Look there ! ” And he wheeled about suddenly and pointed with his stick, as if it had been an old wizard’s wand. “Look yonder at the beach,” he said. “On the flat boulder by which we found the bed of garnets when you and I were too young—eighty years ago, is it?—to know that you were the child of nobles, and I a worm ! ”

And there, on the low, flat rock, distinct against the turbid darkness of the sky, sat the pretty Barbara, a brown-eyed lass of six-

teen, and the arm about her shoulder was the arm of young Ben Benvoisie, the old man's grandson, and his face, a handsome tawny face with the blue fire of its eyes, was bent toward hers — and hers was lifted.

“Leave them to their dream a little while, Old Madame, before you wake them,” said the old man, in a strangely altered voice.

“I shall not wake them,” said Elizabeth.

And they were silent a moment again, looking down at the figures on the rocks. And the two faces that had bent together there, had clung together in their first long sweet kiss of love, parted, with the redness of innocent blushes on them, and were raised toward the distant sea, now dimly streaked with foam and wind.

“I have seen ninety years,” said old Ben Benvoisie. “And you, Old Madame?”

“I have lived eighty-five,” she answered, absently.

“Long years, long years,” he said. “But, at last,” he said, “at last, Dame Elizabeth, my flesh and blood and yours are one!”

Elizabeth turned to move away, but his voice again arrested her. "Look ye!" he said. "When those two are one, once and forever, when Chaslesmarie is sunk in Benvoisie, when you are conquered at last, I shall tell them where Master Louis buried his moneys, Old Madame!"

She had been going on without a word; but she stopped and looked back over her shoulder. "Only they are conquered, Ben Benvoisie, who contend," she said. "And I have never contended. Perhaps I had rather see her dead. I do not know. But Barbara has her own life to live in these changed times. She is too young, I am too old, to make her live mine. And were I conquered," she cried in a great voice, "it is not by you, but by age and the slow years and death! I defy you, as I have defied Fate! For, take the bread from my mouth, the mantle from my back, yet while I live the current in my veins remains," cried the old Titaness, "and while I live that current will always run with the courage and the honor of the Chaslesmaries and Champer-noues!"

“Not so,” said the other. “Conquered you are. Conquered because your race ceases. Because Chaslesmarie is swallowed up in Benvoisie as death is swallowed up in victory!”

But she had gone on into the gathering darkness of the storm, from which the young people fled up the shore, and heard no more. And the storm burst about the island, and the old Chaslesmarie Mansion answered it in roof and rafter, trembling as if to the buffets of striving elemental foes. And all at once the flames wrapped it; and gilded wainscot, Dutch carving, ancestral portraits, were only a pile of hissing cinders when the morning sun glittered on rain-drops, rocks, and river. And Elizabeth, with her little hair-coffer of cere-clothes and money, had gone to Hope's cottage, and old Ben Benvoisie was found stretched upon the grave where she had seen him sitting. And they never knew where Cousin Louis had buried his money.

“Miss Barbara! Barbara, honey!” called old Phillis, again, a little before noon.

"Where's this you's hiding at? Old Madame wants ye. Don't ye hear me tell?"

And pretty Barbara came hesitatingly up the rocks that made each dwelling in the place look as if it were a part of the island itself, tearful and rosy and sparkling, And by her side, grave as became him that day, and erect and proud as his grand-parent, was old Ben Benvoisie's grandson.

"Barbara," said the Old Madame presently, breaking through the reverie caused by their first few words, "did my eyes deceive me yesterday? Have you cut adrift? Have you made up your mind that you can do without fine dresses and silver dishes and —"

"Why, I always have," said Barbara, looking up simply.

"That is true," said Elizabeth. "And so they do not count for much. And you think you know what love is—you baby? You really think you love this sailor-lad? Tell me, how much do you love him, child?"

"As much, Madame dear," said Barbara,

shyly, dimpling, glancing half askance, "perhaps as much, grandmamma, as you loved Cousin Louis."

"Say you so? Then it were enough to carry its light through life and throw it far across the dark shadows of death, my child! And you," she said, turning suddenly and severely to young Ben. "Is it for life, or for a holiday, a pleasuring, a pastime?"

He looked at her as if, in spite of the claims of parentage and her all but century of reign, he examined her right to ask. "Since Barbara promised me," said he at last, "I have felt, Old Madame, like one inside a church."

"Something in him," said Elizabeth. "Not altogether the sweetness of the senses, but rather the sacredness of the sacrament."

And although they were not married for twice a twelvemonth, Elizabeth considered that she had married them that morning. And the reddest bonnet-rouge among the fishermen had a thrill as if all thrones were levelled when, at old Ben Benvoisie's funeral,—in the simple procession where none

rode,—after young Ben and Barbara, they saw Hope and Old Madame walk, as became the next of kin.

And so one year and another crept into the past. And at length Old Madame fell ill.

“I am going now, Hope,” she said. “I should like to see Barbara’s baby before I go. But remember that there is money for my burial in the little coffer. And there is still the Dernier’s wood-land to sell —”

“Do not think of such things now,” said Hope. “God will take care of us in some way. He always has. We are as much a part of the universe as the rest of it.”

“We are put in this world to think of such things,” said Elizabeth. “We are put in this world to live in it, not to live in another. Now I am going to another. We shall see what that will be. From this I have had all it had to give. I came into it with the reverence and revenue of princes. I go out of it a beggar,” she cried, in a tone that tore Hope’s heart. “I came into it in purple — I go out of it in rags —”

Rags. Before they laid her away with those who had made part of her career of splendor and of sorrow, they opened the little hair-coffer,—moths had eaten the grave-clothes and a mouse had made its nest in the bank-notes. And to-day nothing is left of Chaslesmarie or Champernoune—not even a name and hardly a memory. And the blood ennobled by the King of France is the common blood of the fishers of the island given once with all its serfs and vassals—the island-fishers who sell you a string of herring for a shilling.

Ordronaux

Ordronnaux



HARDLY had Ordronnaux married Emilia when circumstances developed in him an extraordinary—jealousy one might call it, had he had any one concerning whom to be jealous; but as it was, the passion must be as nameless as the sin against the Holy Ghost.

He had married Emilia, knowing that she cared nothing for him, but knowing also that she cared for no one else, and presuming that his devotion could warm the stone to life. In fact he had not been sure that he would not rather have it so than otherwise; and perhaps he had pictured in his dreams the slow dawn of the rosiness of love across the cold marble of his statuesque wife. He had never pictured in any dream the unbearable suffering it might be

if that cold marble remained always icy to his touch, irresponsible to his smile.

In the first moment that he had seen Emilia, still young himself and she far younger, he had adored her. He was calling at the country-house of a friend, when the beautiful thing coming in at the glass door, tall and slender and with her arms full of flowers, paused waiting for her companions who had lingered on the lawn outside. A face like the face of a dream it was that Ordronnaux saw, he hardly believed he saw it till he looked again,—so soft and bright, with the pale carmine of the cheek, the snow of the forehead, the deep violet of the black-lashed eye, the violet shadows around it; and he noted all the beauty in a glance, from the pearly oval of the chin to the glitter of the chestnut hair waving in ripples of gold and brown about a perfect head, whose stag-like carriage gave such alluring intimation of that shy reserve which one longs to penetrate, as one does some hollow of the woods, whose wealth sunbeam and sudden shadow half reveals

and veils. As she turned and saw him, a little startled, she dropped a part of the roses and honeysuckles that she held, and bent to gather them again. He sprang to help her; he touched her warm, white hand, a lock of her hair brushed his face, he looked in her great sweet innocent eyes, and when he rose he had resolved to marry her! Then her companions came in, and there were greetings and presentations and gayety and confusion; and presently Louise was singing at the piano, and Alice and Captain Harriman were waltzing down the room to her song; the others were flirting over the photographs; and through all the commotion Emilia sat calmly in the embrasure of the window, weaving her flowers, without speaking—it seemed to him as serene and inaccessible as a star.

He placed himself beside her, and passed the spray towards which she stretched her hand. But though she responded gently to his sentences, she said almost nothing herself;—he imagined then that her silence was more eloquent than words; when she

lifted those violet eyes, he felt the same emotion as when reading an exquisite poem; when the white lids fell it was like the ceasing of music. In three months he married Emilia.

When he first proposed, although most men would have called it decided rejection, Ordronnaux considered that his proposal was neither refused nor accepted. "Please say no more," she murmured. "I could not love you." She was not a month from school, and her notion of a lover, nourished on the romances read aloud in the dormitory by stealth, was of some one very different from Ordronnaux, of whom she had heard Harriman say that when going about his mountain-farm he wore his trousers tucked into great top-boots, and was followed by a pack of hounds, and the picture had impressed her unpleasantly; the lovers in her romances were always in full dress. But Ordronnaux followed her home; he took the hearts of father and mother by storm,—such hearts as they had; he told them what Emilia

had said to him, and they added their persuasions to his.

It was a home whose poverty, if it did not just escape squalor, was yet very hampering, especially to high-born tradition; she had just left that other home, the home of her late schoolmates, Alice and Louise, where luxury and beauty were the handmaids, and she felt the wants and restrictions here as though the place were noisome — the little rooms, the shabby furnishing, the scanty table, the weary and irritable nerves of her mother, the fierce humors of her unfortunate father. She did not know any way to avoid them all; she had been educated not for work, but for display — for the treasure of her beauty had been early discovered, and it had been intended that she should make a brilliant marriage. Now that the chance had come, and she had declined to take advantage of it and of the means of restoring her family to its old place, peace was allowed her neither by day nor night. Well — Ordronnaux' home was like the one, leaving which had so lately made her feel as if the gates of

Paradise had closed : if she married him, he would take her there, he would provide for those she left behind. It was the selling of a slave ; but yet she might learn to love him, — there was no reason why not, — only that he had loved her too suddenly and too much, and had suffered her to feel it, and had so repelled her, as a flower might shrink from the too ardent sun. There are women who need to be compelled, and who feel only contempt for the suppliant.

One night as Ordronnaux sat listening to the mother, — an appalling woman, — Emilia revolved all these things : she was so still that he thought it could be only because he was detestable to her. She left the room on some errand, and as she returned he came out and met her in the little hall ; he bade her good night, and he took the hand she proffered — and in a sudden despair he raised it to his lips. “ Do not be offended,” he said but half audibly, throwing back his head with a haughty defiance of his hopelessness. “ It is the last, as well as the first time. I am going away. For since it never can be mine —”

“Will you have it without the love?” she asked, not looking up, red with shame.

In an instant, he had bent his head again above the hand and had covered it with kisses and with tears. She opened her great eyes in astonishment; she knew nothing of the wild moods and crises of passion.

“I do not understand,” she said, “how you can be willing to marry a woman who does not love you.”

“If I do not make you love me, once my wife!” he cried — “then may God forget me in my day of trouble!” he added, between his teeth.

She trembled with a superstitious fear of him and of his love.

“Are you sure you will not regret it?” she asked, falteringly.

“Never! Never!”

“Nor make me?”

“I will make you happy!” he said as fervently as though he took an oath.

She did not know how to play with a man’s sufferings; having given him hope, he might have his way — and she married him the next week.

What a hateful wedding-journey it was! They spent a day in New York, where a mistress of the modes, as she called herself, waited on Emilia in her rooms with fabrics and styles, measured her, noted her complexion and the color of her hair, in what Emilia felt as prolonged insolence; and then they were travelling where, as it chanced, Emilia's simple wardrobe answered all purposes, and on their return to the city a trousseau awaited her to whose preparation the dressmaker had bent all her resources, and to accept which Emilia found harder than she had found it to accept Ordronnaux.

As Emilia, preparing for the first ball given in her honor by Ordronnaux' friends, put on the royal silk, the web-like lace, bound the golden bands about her wrists, it all seemed to her a livery of service. As she lifted her hands the clink of her heavy bracelets was like the clank of chains; and her face burned with the disgrace. But she did not tear the livery off, as in the first moment she had felt inclined. It was due to Ordronnaux that his wife should appear as he wished.

“If I am his wife,” she said, “I have a right to this sumptuousness.” But the color did not leave her cheek, for she knew that in her inmost soul she was no wife at all—only a creature that had been bought and sold. And she slowly began to hate the buyer.

But what a picture she was, as Ordronnaux came into the room for her—the white velvet of the toilette, with its satin facings pale-tinted as if a sunbeam had sifted through a rose upon them; the creamy Alençon lace, the dimpled arm, the waxen shoulder, the half defiant, half submissive air, the perfect head and face and bloom! He came smilingly towards her, and opening a box he held, he took from it and bound in her hair a bandeau of great solitaire stones, about her throat another, and flower by flower of diamond sparks he fastened together for her to secure upon her bodice till the stomacher was all ablaze. She shivered when it was done, and drew the lace across them, half shrouding their radiance—and then she

saw herself in the mirror. Perhaps she would not have been a woman if there had not come a pulse of pleasure at the sight ; but, directly, the lovely vision in the glass was blurred by the big tear that followed — it might have been so different if she had loved the giver. Ordronnaux did not see the tear ; stooping he laid a kiss on the white shoulder, and then all at once he folded his arms about her and she felt his great heart beat. Quickly and angrily she freed herself. “ Don’t ! Don’t ! ” she cried before she thought. “ Don’t try to buy my love with gifts or you may buy my hate ! ”

A winter wind with all its frost could not have blown a bitterer breath across a blossoming field than these words, this action, flung across Ordronnaux’ new hopes. He drew back, chilled to his heart of hearts. It would have been impossible for him to sneer — but just then there came a rap upon the door. “ Mrs. Ordronnaux’ carriage is waiting for her,” said the servant with profound obeisance ; and whether Ordronnaux felt it or not, Emilia felt a sneer in the

mere circumstance. Nor could she quite discriminate — it seemed to her that, after all, the sneer came from Ordronnaux, though he had only laid her cashmere on her shoulders and handed her without a word to her carriage. Yet when the night was over, and she returned triumphant to the hotel from the ovation which Ordronnaux' friends had rendered to his wife, she half repented herself. She was sensible that the homage was rendered to her own obvious beauty and fancied sweetness too, yet she knew well how much was owing to the position in which Ordronnaux had placed her; she knew from her brief month's experience in Alice's home that neither her beauty nor her sweetness would command this homage without the splendor also. "It was the conduct of a silly girl," she said to herself, dwelling still upon the moment before they went out. "I will do better," she said, "next time." But next time did not come.

Ordronnaux' nature was a strangely inflammable one, and a hurt healed but slowly

under its feverish stress. Proud and pained, he could not submit to such a rebuff again; and, while still smarting, he resolved to woo Emilia no more in the old way. Perhaps he was angry with her, the least in the world: for all that, his passion was none the less—only every throb of the unanswered love was all the greater pang for the anger that made it so sore. Some natural self-respect told him that she did not know him; he saw that he had been too precipitate; he hoped that many days of closer life alone with him might reveal to her a side that was worthy of her affection; he determined to take her away,—as soon as the period which had been given out as that of their intended stay had elapsed,—to his home, where in much seclusion she could learn to lean on him, and where he would surround her with silent tenderness, but never annoy her again with expression of it till the time seemed ripe.

Poor Ordronnaux! He was not accustomed to this self-abasement. So far his life had been a success; he had wished for

little that did not come with the wish ; fortune had smiled upon him, and so had women — and now the only woman whose smile could make his sunshine was colder than snow. He had been in many respects a fine fellow,—generous, brave, kind and gentle ; he had hardly any conceit,—thinking that much was due to circumstance and little to himself, that prodigality was no virtue when one cared nothing for what was squandered, that courage was an easy thing where there was no constitutional timidity, that misfortune had never tried his temper. He did not pride himself upon his integrity ; anything other than integrity he would have believed impossible to an Ordronnaux. He was not a handsome man ; though one who loved him would have found a rough grandeur in the straight, strong lines of his dark face, and his smile was an illumination. Doubtless if Emilia, ignorant as she was of all experience of love, had been thrown into his society, and allowed to remain without feeling herself an object of too passionate pursuit, without having all her antagonism

aroused by undue pressure, without being sullied by the suggestion that her beauty was at barter for his wealth, without having every avenue of romance closed upon her too, she would have felt for him eventually some degree of attachment. Now, in spite of her resolve to do better,—perhaps somewhat because he afforded her no opportunity to carry out the resolve,—when she saw Ordronnaux opposite her in the carriage, silent and abstracted, the sight sometimes gave her a disdainful repulsion; as she took his arm to enter an assembly,—rustling and glittering though she were in the lustre of his gifts,—it was almost with a quiver of abhorrence. She was afraid of herself; she prayed every night of her life that she might be made to love her husband—and resented his existence every morning.

But Ordronnaux did not fail in any observance. He addressed her as Emilia, and remembering, it might be, that in his mother's church it was held that by assuming the attitude of receiving the living grace, grace could not fail to come, he followed a course of con-

duct which by taking it for granted that everything was right between them, might some day, through sheer force of habit, make it so. That Emilia should not feel this reducing her to the level of a household pet, and revolt against it, tacitly and decently, but with all her strength, was not to be expected. Tacit as the revolt was, Ordronnaux, of course, was aware of it; yet why such devotion should be repugnant to her who had never known a lover he did not understand. Sometimes he was conscious of a resentment on his own part, a dull, smouldering resentment in which there was, nevertheless, a spark of fire,—a resentment against the coldness, the silence, the daily robbery of happiness, the withholding of the smiles that should be his, the veiling of the emotions he should share,—yet he smothered it, knowing that she had promised nothing, that it was his task to win all. Still, he was possessed with eagerness to know the nature that she hid. Thus he kept her under survey—every word, glance, gesture; nothing escaped him. If she looked lingeringly at a land-

scape he remembered it ineffaceably, if she stooped to smell a flower he plucked it, if she smiled at a thought he was on fire to know the thought; he was envious of the moments when she was alone,—though heaven knows she made the moments when he was with her insufferable,—and, while he adored her as his mistress, he distrusted her as his rival. “He watches me as a wild creature watches its prey,” she thought. “Is it doubt, or love? Or is it more like a sort of madness than either!” But the truth was that he was full of an indefinable jealousy of herself!

In pursuance of his system, and because it gave him a proud pleasure,—pleasure whose other side was pain,—he rode and drove with her, was sufficiently by her side at dinners, receptions and operas, took her everywhere she might desire to go: people who watched them could have seen only the customary absorption of the newly-married; people who listened to them could have heard only the gently spoken commonplaces of two rather silent and high-bred persons,

who did not carry their hearts on their sleeves.

"Ordronnaux is infatuated," Harriman, who had been in the city, said to Alice on his return. "He loves with what you may call fatuity. It is certainly *maladroit*."

"To give a woman the whip-hand so?" laughed Colonel Greve. "You women have been slaves so long, you make sad tyrants when you have the chance!"

"How disagreeable!" said Alice. "It vexes me to hear you talk so. There is no such thing as tyranny and fatuity in love."

"Well, it is, at any rate," said Harriman, "very uncomfortable for anybody who knows what a brilliant fellow Ordronnaux is,—you never saw him, did you, Greve?—to meet him now! He is so occupied furtively watching Emilia, listening to her, admiring her, under his mask of elegant passivity, that he appears—I shouldn't like to say, doltish—"

"No, I should hope not!" cried Louise.

"But tame and torpid," said Harriman, "to the last degree. I hope he shines a

little more in private or Emilia will think she has married nothing but a gold-stick in waiting!"

They were in a gallery of paintings one morning, Ordronaux and Emilia, and had paused to look at a picture — a strange picture for them to look at together. "Two in the Campagna," was its name, and stray remembrances of the poem it illustrated flashed upon them both as they gazed at the vast champaign with its ruined tombs, its broken arches, its nebulous purples, the ghost of the great city far away, the two lovers on the grass with all the glory of the sunlit air trembling about them — about them and their passion, their perplexity, their pain.

"What are the verses?" asked Ordronaux, bending over her. "Can you recall them now? I heard you reciting them once, almost a year ago, I think. I used to know them myself:

‘ Let us be unashamed of soul,
As earth lies bare to heaven above,
How is it under our control
To love or not to love ? ’ ”

He repeated, low-voiced,

“ ‘ I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more,—
Nor yours, nor mine, nor slave nor free ’—

I seem to have lost them,” he said.

Emilia would have bitten off her tongue rather than not have continued the recitation in unshaken tones. Since he knew she could hardly have forgotten the poem, not to repeat it was to imply that she would not feel it if she could, to falter was to imply that she meant it.

“ ‘ I would I could adopt your will,
See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill
At your life’s springs, your part, my part
In life for good or ill.’ ”

“ Ah, yes,” he said, as she ceased. “ I remember it all now. A powerful picture, a powerful poem. Yes —

“ ‘ Only I discern
Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn! ’ ”

And there was a bitter intensity in his tone that Emilia could not fail to understand, and of which she was still thinking,—for to her the poem bore a very different meaning, when he sauntered away to speak with some one in another portion of the gallery, and left her sitting there.

As she gazed at the picture, without seeing it now, a person at the other end of the sofa rose, and she glanced aside: a tall, pale man with a rather heroic face, as seen in that swift half glimpse, and a knightly bearing despite his crutch,—evidently a soldier wounded in the war,—made her the very slightest inclination, a sort of irresistible tribute to the glance of such beautiful eyes, and went out. She looked after him absently, and, when her gaze returned, she saw that he had left a white rose,—a little white Scotch rose with which he had been trifling,—upon her open catalogue that lay on the sofa between them. She took up the catalogue, and the rose with it, unaware that Ordronnaux, in approaching, had seen the whole, and she held it, quite sure it was no

accident, half wondering, not wholly pleased, and yet somehow vaguely touched. She kept the rose when she took Ordronnaux' arm, partly for its sweetness, partly because she could not churlishly refuse so simple an offering, partly for the grain of sentiment dear to her who felt herself starved for it; he observed it in a glass upon her table by and by; and he was there in the evening when she moved in her slow grace, as she saw a full-blown petal drop, and took the rose and shut it in a book. "I like to come across a dead rose in a book," she said. thoughtlessly to the caller who was present, she seldom spoke to Ordronnaux when she could help it, "I fancy some romance shut in with it there." The whole thing was simple enough; but Ordronnaux would not have stayed in the city another night; and it was the next day that he took her home by a roundabout Canadian journey that consumed some weeks. The turf had long been green in the city squares, and the sunny slopes purple with violets; that embowered ancestral mansion of his among the hills, with all

its flower-set lawns about it, would be putting on its loveliest look, and Ordronnaux wished Emilia to see it first when not one white rose, but a myriad, climbed around the windows !

“ Emilia,” he said, as they alighted at the porch, while the breath of the honeysuckles floated about them, and turned to look down the velvet swards, with their border of freshly green chestnut wood, to the great cliff whose wall rose between them and the lower earth, “ this is your home. I wish,” he said fervently, “ I wish you may be happy here ! ”

“ I thank you,” she said.

It could not have been less to the merest stranger. She felt herself a liar in making it so much.

He led her through the apartments, quaint and low-browed with the old beams and panels of the ceilings, apartments enriched by the gleanings of the foreign travel of many generations of wealth : the lovely drawing-rooms, where want of height was compensated by space and the immense crystal openings of the windows that made them all

sunshine, save where the shadows of leaves were dappling the white velvet carpets among their rose and azure hints and phantoms of flowers: there were marble sirens and sylphids shining between the pale silken curtains there, mellow landscapes now and then upon the walls, now and then a bronze beautiful as when some ancient dreamer first saw its god stand dark against the sunny sky, an ebony escritoire, or easel, with its mosaic, throwing up the splendor here, an oriental trevet, a wonder of gilding and lacquer starting from the shadows there, silken divan and fauteuil and hassock of the same pale perfect tints as curtains and carpets, soft in shade as the fading clouds are, almost as pillowy — rooms too brilliant and beautiful for Emilia's moods. Nor did she like much better the dark library, with its cases carved from black and ancient teak, solid and heavy as the primeval rock, the desk upheld by a bent deity of Farther India with all his dragon-like folds and involutions, the table a huge black lotus itself; the whole place full of demoniacal sugges-

tions of learning. There were other rooms no more to her fancy, for the translucent china and the ringing salvers had a covert insult to her excited sensitiveness; and the first exclamation of pleasure that she uttered was over a little parlor at the head of a flight of stairs. Everything seemed to be quite a hundred years old there; the once vermilion velvets of the hangings and the unique upholstery had faded now to a silver grey, with a mere dream of the rose left upon them, a sort of frosty hoariness over all. Through the single window, a long balconied window, the sunlit steeps of a distant mountain hung its valleys in mid-air, a magnificent picture full of magical moods and changes. There was but one other—a portrait, hanging opposite the window, of a dark and pale lady.

“Do you like the room?” asked Ordronnaux.

“It is very lovely,” said Emilia.

“Make it your sitting-room,” he replied then, “where you are never to be disturbed. It opens from your dressing-room, you see;

my own rooms are on the other side." And then he led her to the portrait. "It is my mother," he said, as they stood before it. And, in spite of all contradictory feeling, there was something exquisitely pathetic to Emilia in the moment; she pitied Ordronnaux and his dead mother as she did herself, and the tears dazzled her an instant.

It was one of those well-painted portraits whose eyes follow you. Emilia had not noticed it before. As she looked at it now she could not hinder a sense of guilt,—those eyes were capable of reading her soul; and it was not so she should have met her husband's mother. It seemed all at once impossible to live with those eyes pursuing her. Calm, clear eyes — presently they would be avenging eyes.

"If she were but alive!" Ordronnaux said. "She would have loved you well."

Emilia was only thankful she was dead.

And so it happened that in all the old-fashioned house, there was not a single room whose atmosphere Emilia could assimilate with that of her own interior life, and the

whole place was only a beautiful prison, a prison that she loathed the first day she crossed its threshold—loathed it because it was her place of bondage, loathed it because all the old Ordronnaux' that had once made a part of it seemed to rise in every room and to rebuke her.

There were not many neighbors, nor were those very congenial—a few wealthy families who of late years came for the summer scenery, and had bought some acres from the small farmers; the Ordronnaux' owned mountain and forest for miles, still in the original grant which dated back nearly to the days of Captain John Mason. When the first visits were received, and one or two stupid tea-parties given and returned, the social intercourse was almost at an end.

The domestic machinery was so perfect that where Emilia was, no murmur of it came. In the long bright mornings, the birds, the bees, the wind in the leaves, made all the sound there was. Ordronnaux was away, perhaps, riding about the farm, whither she had declined to ride with him,

selecting the timber that needed felling in the woods, or else writing and reading in the library; and Emilia was very lonely. In the evenings they sat together, as she felt necessary in her sacrifice to outward decency, for they had an unspoken compact of civility—he with his newspapers, she with her fancy-work or book. At first Ordronnaux read aloud whatever was of interest; but Emilia's absent air of revery was often what no gentleman could break in upon; and save the few simple phrases uttered occasionally, there would be no sound the evening through but the plaintive moaning of the *Æolian* harp she had strung in a hall-window, and which nearly drove Ordronnaux wild. Thus the loneliness became something palpable, and out of its intense isolation Emilia divined that she was to be starved into love—and all the rebel in her rose. She knew that she was wrong; she felt herself wicked; the feeling only made her more so. In some inexplicable way she nursed an increasing rancor towards Ordronnaux—to think that the place might have

been so dear to her, that the morning rides in the green sun and shadow of the woods might have been so pleasant, the long evenings together might have been so rapturous, his gifts so precious, if she had but loved her husband! That she did not, she held to be his fault, not hers. "He has work before him, if he means to break me in!" she said, and quite aware that she did it viciously, she laid out for herself a course of study that should make the days fly—but it did not. "At any rate," she said, "it will keep me from losing my reason."

Going on with her work of hating Ordronnaux,—for indifference toward a lover must needs harden to harshness towards a jailer,—Emilia took, of course, no pains to preserve his admiration. She put on the simple garments of the wardrobe she had at her marriage; she knotted her long hair in the easiest fashion. Yet, although Ordronnaux, remembering women in resplendent toilets, might wish Emilia would array herself in the brightness that belonged to the Ordronnaux ladies—through it all he could think only of a

goddess in disguise, for she could not change the silver-sweet tones of her voice, she could not change the warmth of carnation on her cheek, the depth of the violet in her eye, and every movement, every outline was only flowing grace.

As for Ordronnaux, the loneliness reacted on him corrosively. Though he loved his home, and had been full of his object of winning her in it, yet he had been accustomed to having his friends about him here, and wide-hearthed hospitality had been the order of the day. Now to sit before the statue of a martyr for hours was fast getting to be an ordeal. It was not, however, that mere material loneliness of Emilia's that he felt,—and from which, in some unwhispered way, she yet unconsciously looked for escape,—it was the loneliness of the inner soul. He was losing confidence ; and his days and his nights were a keen misery. With all his passion he could not choke back a subtle, acrimonious under-current of mortification at his failure ; sometimes a swift choler tore a fiery sentence from his lips,—Emilia only glancing up in a silent

surprise and shrinking closer to herself; but he saw in that glance the wild spirit looking through her eyes that he had never made captive. Yet sometimes again as she sat, unconscious of his gaze, tired and sad and listless, he yearned over her, he felt that he must take her in his arms and comfort her or his heart would burst, and he pitied her as you would pity a sick child. He saw that he had made a great mistake; he feared that the task he had set himself was an impossible one; he began to be hopeless of overcoming the hostility in which, despite its headstrong folly, he could see a germ of justice.

It was once when compassion got the better of his more selfish determination, as it often did just when he thought his resolution was the sternest, that he invited her family to visit her. Emilia countermanded the invitation. She sent her sister some of Ordronnaux' unused gifts, her mother the money to take a different journey, telling them, briefly, her plans had changed. She felt that they had sold her, and she had not

yet forgiven them enough to care to see them. When Ordronnaux heard of this, he turned towards Emilia in amazement, "I thought I was giving you a pleasure, Emilia!" he said. "Shall I never find myself making you happy?"

She threw her arms up suddenly with a gesture of abandon and despair. "You are making me devilish!" she said. And she rushed past him from the room.

He had worshipped this woman, he had expended himself in her service, he had bound himself in iron fetters at her feet, and she told him that his presence, his efforts, his love, were making her devilish! He was mad with rage—an insane whirl of blind, angry fury in which he lost all consciousness of himself. He dashed from the house and traversed for hours, uncovered, the rainy woods, he knew not where or how. He never knew when he returned—he found himself in bed; the physician and nurse beside him; a beautiful shadow, a cold and unpitying phantom of a wife, going and coming about him.

He lay there and looked at her day after day, so calm, so unmoved, doing her technical duty, and doing it without a ray of warmth — whether she read to him, as she would have read beside a hospital bed, or soothed his aching temples with the magnetic touch of her fingers, or sung him softly to sleep. He was weak in his self-pity to think it was so much to him, so little to her. And then he marvelled at and despised himself.

And as he got about, a great change came over Ordronnaux.

He had been looking at the past as one looks at the wrong side of a tapestry, and deriding himself, and questioning if there were woman born who would not scout such a slave as he had been. He said the glamour of beauty had deceived him, that he was like the poor fellow of the middle-ages who wedded one of the Wild Ladies, and found her not flesh and blood. He said that the fever had burned out all his passion, that it was impossible he should love Emilia any more.

Sometimes now, indeed, in the new line

of thought which he allowed himself, Ordronnaux wondered if Emilia discharged her duty so perfectly as to satisfy herself — she whom it was so hard to satisfy ! And in this wonder he found himself wondering if there were any other whose remembrance stood between him and his wife ; yet he knew there was not,—since she had never received a gallantry more pronounced than the giving of that white rose in the picture-gallery had been,—and he felt like one guilty of sacrilege. But an idea that has found entrance into the mind, like vermin in the house, is not easily abolished ; and observing her in her cold pride, her mechanical duty, her sublime belief that no fault was hers, he suspected her worthiness. As he longed for her love, he longed for her humiliation. “ I had better lose her altogether,” he said, “ than have her as she is. I want no odalisque.”

Emilia should have had a care ; it is one thing to be the prisoner of a magnanimous adorer, another to be that of an offended master. She should have remembered that

there are luscious wines, which make a sharp vinegar. Ordronnaux had not altogether deceived himself; he must at that time have ceased, at any rate for awhile, to love Emilia.

But a man with the affairs of an estate on his hands does not give all his attention to affairs of the heart; and although these might be the dominant of Ordronnaux' life, he had necessarily to bestow a good deal of time on more material considerations. Nevertheless a thought, a determination, that has once taken shape, hardens when you are not thinking of it.

"I met Captain Harriman in town yesterday," said Ordronnaux at dinner one day, after a couple of nights' absence. "He is to be married in March."

"It is settled then," remarked Emilia indifferently, crumbling her bread.

"You are not enthusiastic on the subject," he said with that strange, new smile of his, although she did not lift her eyes to see it.

"On marriage? Oh, no."

“I thought you might be interested; you were such friends. Though to be sure,” lifting his eyebrows, “women’s friendships, like their other emotions, are rather inscrutable.”

“I am very fond of Alice. But why she should leave so delightful a home —”

“Perhaps a home is not all she thinks of in marrying!” exclaimed Ordronnaux. “Well,” he added quickly, as if to cover the outburst, “I asked him to bring Alice and Louise here for Christmas; and I suppose Louise will like to have Colonel Greve invited — a match, I imagine, though I have not seen him yet.”

“They have never been in a hill country in winter,” answered Emilia, as if to make it evident that she considered it no affair of hers who came or went, in that house.

“Nor have you either, Emilia.”

“No,” she said, in a tone as cool as the season she spoke of.

“I chose that time,” said Ordronnaux, “because I shall be going and coming a good deal till then, if not afterward also,

off and on, with business. I hope you will not be more lonesome than usual."

"Not in the least," said Emilia. And if there were any sarcasm in his hope, there was as much in her assurance.

But in the compassion that so frequently overcame his sternest resolves,—and that, when he was a boy, and had trapped any little wild animal, always made him give it one chance for its life,—the next morning, after the servants had left the room, and Ordronnaux and his wife had returned to the perusal of the letters they had opened as usual and laid down again beside their breakfast plates, he glanced up from a long document and said: "I have been thinking that you will find so little to amuse you while I am gone, that really you had better accompany me."

"Do not concern yourself about me," she cried tartly, with a deep flush on her cheek and a sparkle in her eye, and escaped from the room quickly. Perhaps it was nothing but the April weather of her moods in which now every day there came storms

and showers. Perhaps the letter she had just read perplexed her or incensed her. Whatever it was, she had the day for second thoughts.

“By the Lord, this is a happy home!” cried Ordronnaux, stalking from the room himself. “These poles shall be changed for better or worse by spring!” And he did not return till twilight.

When he did come home, though, the air was serene again. A fire of unhewn logs, such as, later in the season, blazed everywhere through the house, rolled its flames in the great chimney-place, and diffused warmth across the premature chill of the stormy night; and Emilia sat beneath the lamp, as beautiful as any dream. No stranger gazing through the pane could have conjectured how hollow a simulacrum of a home was the charming scene.

“By the way,” said Ordronnaux, after a while, closing his book, “I neglected to say yesterday,—not, of course, that it matters to me now,—but after our guests arrive, it will give me pleasure if you—will wear—”

He paused. Whether you are careless of giving offence or not, it is difficult to command a person to wear your gifts that have been scorned.

“Oh, certainly,” said Emilia, looking up lightly. “All my splendor is at their service. I should not think of anything else.” The graciousness of air and tone might have been disconcerting to Ordronnaux a little while ago.

Yet Emilia could have given you no reason for her graciousness. Only her heart was something lighter than it had been, if her brain was bewildered. When she ran up into her sitting-room that morning, she had opened the letter crumpled in her hand and glanced at it again, as if to make sure it was no fairy paper to turn into withered leaves — perhaps to make sure that any one dared so address her. It was a brief letter, as the eyes of the portrait reading over her shoulder might have seen :

“I had hoped there would be no trouble in your lot. But I saw you walking in the wood, and you were weeping; I have seen

it many times. Has sorrow so early cast her shadow across you? Can you not step into the sunshine, and let the shadow stay where it belongs — on me? Is sympathy of value to you? Can you find comfort in the thought that one is near you, not a stranger, even though the tie is nothing more than a dead white rose?"

As Emilia read those concluding lines some sound made her turn her head, and she encountered the eyes of that portrait. She crushed the paper together under the convicting glance, without an idea why she did so, and hurriedly went away. But all day she carried the note about with her, and read it and re-read it; and by nightfall a curious exultation filled her, as she thought there was one person in the world she might call friend. Father and mother had sacrificed her; Alice, Louise, and her companions had but hastened on the sacrifice; here was, perhaps, one friend whom she might really call her own! And as she sat under the lamp that evening, sheltered as her face was with her fan, Ordronnaux or another could but

have admired the half smile playing round the lip and the dreamy light in the eye.

Did Emilia, with reflection, if not with instinct, resent this intrusion? Did she feel any outrage upon her as a wife, any insult as a woman? Not after that first bewilderment, the first shrinking, the first blush. All her wrongs she carried over to the account of Ordronnaux; it was owing to his false step that she could be the recipient of such a letter. Should she answer it? Oh, no, of course not. Nor could she, by the way; there was no address — a punctilio that pleased her. Yet, after all, it was not unpleasant to have had it; it was not unpleasant to feel a reserve of strength in that unknown ally. An older woman might have been wroth with the writer; but Emilia felt the secret of her discontent safe with one who cared to make it less, and valued his commiseration above her pride. She was extremely young; she was at variance with everybody; she knew nothing of the world; she needed a friend sorely. She remembered but very dimly the half-glimpsed face of the

hero who had laid the flower on her book — yet not a face, she was sure, ever to wear a stain of dishonor, the possibility not occurring to her, only the impossibility. She was not sorry when, two days later, there came another note, craving forgiveness if the first one had been in error, asking if she could think that her wonderful beauty had impelled him, rather than the beautiful soul behind it, suggesting that, if she valued the writer's friendship, she should wear, as she walked upon the terrace that day, a white rose.

Ordronnaux happened to be in the greenhouse when she came in, for roses had long since done blossoming outside. As she passed him, he himself gathered a flower and some fragrant leaves, and handed them to her, with a mute glance of his dark eyes. She hesitated, but it was the only white rose in the place; and as she took it, though it was without a word, the act of hypocrisy crimsoned her face. Perhaps the romantic consciousness of her new and viewless friend looking at her from some mysterious coign of vantage compensated Emilia. Ordron-

naux turned on his heel, flicking off with his stick, to the gardener's round-eyed scandal, the heads of a whole row of Japan lilies as he walked away.

In the letter of cordial thanks that came presently to Emilia from the unknown, this time with the postmark of the distant city, an address was given to which she might send a reply. There was a little fire on her hearth, for the mornings and nights were now cool among the hills; Emilia laid the note with its two forerunners on the coals, and watched them shrivel and blaze ere she wrote the reply whose idea she at first had flouted.

"I have burned your letters. They were most kind—too kind for me. I do not know how you found me out. I do not know what makes me trust you so—perhaps my need. But I must try to do my duty alone."

She mailed the letter herself, walking to the village post-office. The woods through which she went on the side of the Cliff were

in the perfect ripeness of their green growth ; sometimes a red branch holding out a torch to illuminate the mossy depths where all wild vines and briers ran riot over the sharp and scattered fragments fallen from the Cliff a century since ; sometimes a wilderness of withered ferns and brakes spreading in the shadow a field of the cloth of gold. A royal wealth of asters and golden-rods glistening with gossamers lined all the path, and here and there a brook, swollen by the early rains, rushed down the wayside steep, a torrent of raging silver falling from the clouds, and gentians and maiden-hair received the spray. The year rested like a full tide whose ebb one has not begun to perceive, and Emilia felt the cheeriness soothe her perturbation. But coming out upon the open country, and seeing the soft low-hanging mists half veiling the winy and golden mosaic of the meadows, and seeing the mountains clothe themselves in new forms and tender colors as she walked, the earthly purple slopes, with all their bloom of distance, refining into the clearer light of infinity and heaven, she felt at odds with the

great peace and beauty. "I am nothing but an atom," she said. "This hard nature goes on the same whether I am wretched or happy. What difference does it make whether I am good or bad?" And she went along, with her wounds freshly opened. As she came inside the gates she met Ordronnaux waiting to make the customary ceremonious adieux ere he rode to the station, amusing himself the while with the prancing of his badly broken horse. He smiled as she approached. "Good-bye," he cried. "I shall be gone perhaps ten days," and he reined up his horse beside her, but did not dismount. "Now," he said gayly, "if I were a knight in an old ballad, you would step upon my foot and climb behind me, and 'cast your arms about me,' and we should ride away and see the world together!" It was but lately he could have spoken in that light manner to Emilia.

"How can you mock me so?" she said, and hurried on.

If Emilia were solitary now, there was presently a certain freedom in the solitude,

a comprehension that at last Ordronnaux cared for her so little that she should be annoyed no more by his anxieties, which sent her spirits up a buoyant and defiant height, and made her feel capable of wild and daring action. It was an unfortunate time for another letter to arrive from the Unknown, for she would surely answer it.

And another letter came from him, refusing to be silenced, pronouncing their correspondence as legitimate as that of any other friendship, declaring himself, in deferentially masked, but unmistakable language, no votary, no lover, saying that through great trouble which had befallen him he needed her consolation as she needed his.

Emilia, of course, failed to see the impertinence of the very existence of this letter. Otherwise, there was a certain delicacy and firmness in its tone that was agreeable to her. When it went on with some slight confidences, it interested her. In years he was not far before her, but in experience, in sensation, he was a generation her senior, the writer said,—trusting possibly to Emilia's

literal reception of his words,—and when they met, if ever, he should be older still by all the crowded experiences of the enterprise he was about to undertake. And he urged her to write to him freely, to write the small incidents of her days, her thoughts, and fancies—a distraction to her, and a delight to him.

And Emilia did.

If her correspondent were one who had any design of evil, he might have been surprised at the simplicity of her letters, awe-struck, in a degree, at the innocence and purity of her soul as those letters translated it, while week by week passed and they still came, speaking of her uneventful life, the books she read, the sights she saw, the reflection those sights kindled—letters dealing at first with little but outside objects, then lingering with enthusiasm over the account of some book she had come across in the great dark library, till stimulated by replies, they hurried on towards emotional and personal confessions, guileless and trifling confidings of a hitherto unsoiled nature ig-

norant of the wrong and dangers here, but confidings which opened the way to closer intimacy. In one letter she had to tell of the autumn burning of the brush at night, and the huge apparitions of the burners passing before the blaze from vast star-lit darkness to darkness, and of the contrast between that Dantean scene and that of the first snow on the Chieftain's head, one blushing sunrise just as the Indian summer came. And if, in reply, he warned her against becoming the spectator at scenic effects of nature rather than the sharer of nature's moods and phases, it only gave her a greater sense of security in writing. In another letter she told him of her climbing the hill in the late autumn morning to see a rainbow slowly throwing its arch along, and building across the hills beneath. "A wondrous sight," she wrote, "the edge of a far blue hill grew green and vivid, then the yellow light broke in a flash beyond, like a wave whose foam was rosy, and as the rose, the gold, the green, came on, the violet followed, the mists rose to make it, weaving to and fro a web spun

of the very dew of the morning, so airy, so unsubstantial, and yet, as the arch sprang whole and perfect, so firm and so fixed, that I could think only of the solid stones at the foundation of the earth, the shining stones, rather, at the foundation of the City of God, you remember, with its chrysoprase, its jacinth and amethyst. St. John must have climbed a mountain-top, and have seen just such a thing as this beneath him before he told of the rainbow like an emerald round the throne."

"Do you think so?" the answer came. "For my part, I imagine the prophet, as the poet, needs no more actual sight than the inner apocalyptic vision. You and I are perhaps far enough from the City of God,—I am, I know,—and need to climb the heights; but to St. John in the desert, that City descended out of heaven. Yet you have interpreted the meaning of your rainbow, the everlasting firmness of the great viewless laws, better than words interpret music."

"I am in the desert, too," she wrote; "and

your letters are bringing me a heavenly peace there. And peace in my house, too,—for, as one in it comes and goes, I can even pity him that he has no such resource, such haven as I have, and can feel some interest in his existence, some sorrow for his state, and the eyes of his dead mother do not pain me as they did. And now that the winter is all about me, and I am shut in by one of its great white, whirling, moonlighted storms, I feel like a cradled child.”

“I am glad you are at peace,” he wrote. “It ought to give me peace to know it. But alas!——Still there is for me the next thing to peace—effort; and for that all directions are open. What if, while you harmonize the elements of your life, I should lose myself striving to complete a harmony only less perfect than spiritual unisons can be? Do you recall, in the little book I sent you, that conception of a future art in which the great science and beauty of color should be developed as fully as that of sound has been? Since nobody feels more keenly than I what may be the opulence of the unrevealed re-

serves of color in the dark and chemic rays, nobody exults more keenly in the depths of the unexhausted wells of color that we have, why shall not I begin the development? To me a sheet of clear and pure tint, be it blush or blue or amber, gives rapturous and inmost satisfaction; and let such colors flow into one another with soft counterchange and silvery blooms, and I have the delight that a perfect strain of music gives. Think then, to those who love absolute color passionately, what some great symphony, founded on the seven colors as on the seven tones, might be, with the palpitating glow and gloom, the combination of its chords, the magnificent movement of its members through all delicious fluctuation to complete correspondence and marriage! Think of a chromata in violet minor, with its radiant correlations! Think of that fancy of Haweis' of delicate 'melodies composed of single floating lights, changing and melting from one slow intensity to another, through the dark, until some tender dawn of opal from below might perchance receive the last flut-

tering pulse of ruby light and prepare the eye for some new passage of exquisite color!' Well, somebody is to discover the notation from which these marvels are to be produced—why not I? Somebody is to discover the instruments, and decide whether they shall appeal to chemistry or to electricity. To my mind those instruments are all ready for the final touch. For since color, as well as sound, is the result of vibration, all that is necessary may be to combine the initial of light and sound, which it would seem that electricity could do in some attachment to the present musical instrument; so that the strings, for instance, should produce the vibration requisite to render the violet rays, the brass the brilliant yellows, the wood the deep rich reds. Think then of the orchestra that in producing any matchless piece,—the Italian Symphony,—shall translate every tone into its own color, or rather every color into its own tone, and you sit with all that changing splendor entrancing your soul to the accompaniment of its perfect music! Yet, I suppose, it is not for

this generation to do, but for one whose childhood is the master of many sciences. I suppose that generation is to come; for since education in the parent becomes instinct in the child, there cannot but some day spring up a great perfect race on our ashes!"

Fanciful speculations — but these, and such as these, beguiled Emilia from herself. How different, she thought, from the tame and commonplace action of Ordronnaux' mind, as she had seen it! And, in return, she poured out her own ideas as freely, revealing artlessly an organization open on every side to the impulses of beauty, and responding to sweet influences like a living growth still adding to its wealth and strength. It would have been evident to any reader that she was young, and that she had a nature to be moulded, but with an individuality withal which it was a fascination to discover, and which to discover was to love — an individuality capable of caprices of shy and sullen reserve to-day, and bountiful confession to-morrow; with a

temper that had needed some hot annealing of trouble; with a heart ready as a rose to open with all its burden in its own time under fostering suns, but not to be torn apart by rude fingers without destruction. It would have been no wonder if the reader of letters so simple, so sweet, so confiding as hers, came to share the fate of all who knew Emilia,—had he begun in hate he could have ended only in love,—if he abandoned himself at last to his passion.

Emilia did not vex herself much at this time about Ordronnaux, nor did he trouble her much with his presence. Tolerably convinced that the old adoration of her beauty was over and done with, she paid little heed to his movements, and never asked herself if his love were capable of arising all the stronger from that reaction. Whether he had penetrated the secret of her letters, or not, never crossed her mind, for it never crossed her mind that it was a secret. When she saw him, outside her window, spending half the day breaking in his great black stallion, she was forced to

admire the two animals together, outlined against the snow, as she admired any bronze in the hall; but, in general, his disquiet, his constant going and coming, his curious scrutiny of herself, his abrupt remarks sometimes, sometimes his strangely gentle air, the undecipherable smile with which she more than once found him regarding her, the way in which he ceased in the midst of what he was saying and suddenly strode from the room, were all to her but parts of the unaccountable and rather disagreeable behavior of one from whom she expected nothing better and to which she gave no second thought. Giving it no second thought, of course she saw no struggle between love and indignation and reproach.

And thus, as the winter had folded more and more closely its white curtains about Emilia, the passage of these letters had been her reliance. There was a strange cold splendor in the air, and the icy glare from the huge Cliff,—which she had so often longed to push out of the way,—walled her out

from the world like the frost of the tomb. Her friends had not come at Christmas, having been detained by the great storms, the cause she imagined of her correspondent's delay in carrying out the enterprise he had spoken of, which she had taken for granted was a long tour, but of which he had made no further mention. Ordronnaux was away a good deal, often kept away by impenetrable drifts; sometimes he was gone on dangerous hunting expeditions for days together — lying at the bottom of some cruel rift, for all she knew, among these hills that seemed to her like vast creatures of some primordial origin crying out to one another now and then in the thunder of an avalanche upon the silent night. When Ordronnaux was at home he spent long hours in the library by himself. But she obeyed the wish that he had expressed, and dressed every evening as for an occasion; she thought, perhaps, that as he had made the beauty his property he had a right to see it set as he chose, or possibly in the general kindness that was pervading her she was willing to

afford him pleasure; possibly she could no longer feel towards him as once she did — for there are emotional and mental processes of unscrutable secrecy even to their possessor. There might have been something heart-piercing in the sight of her, with all her pulsating bloom and brightness, as remote in that world of her own thoughts as if she were a being of another race, another planet. She was no longer the splendid and stately woman, wearing a dignity of wifeness, but a beautiful young girl again, light-footed, light-hearted, kindly spoken, breaking into carols as she moved about the house, living in the hidden little life of her own dreams. Whether Ordronnaux had undergone any new change in her regard or not, sometimes he seemed to feel all this, and he threw down his book and walked the room, where they were sitting, by the half hour. Once as he came in, bringing a puff of frosty air with him, from the piazza where he had been stalking, he went and leaned over her chair, watching the bright flower she wrought; as she glanced up she saw there was a strange

light on his face, his lips were parted, his face fevered. "Are you ill, again?" she exclaimed. But he shook his head and walked away. Presently she looked up once more. "I am not good company for you, am I?" she said. "I did not think till lately that it must be dull for you. Would you like to have me sing to you?" And she went to the piano, and sang. He followed, and turned the leaves for her; now and then he joined in, but only now and then, as if his voice were not quite under his control, as if it were unequal to the weight of some emotion. When she rose, she held the edge of the piano, as if it were all she could do, as she said: "Do you know—I am going to make a confession—"

"It is I that should make confession!" he cried warmly.

"Oh no, indeed," she said in that calm silver treble. "You have done so much to make me contented here, and I have been so ungracious! I—that is—if—if we cannot be more, we can at least be friends?" and she held her hand winningly towards him, in

amazement to see him wheel about and march out of the room. And she heard him treading the crisp snow outside, followed by his dogs.

The letters, and the emotions they aroused, had been having a softening effect on Emilia; she had discerned a glimmer of her culpability in rendering Ordronnaux' home offensive to him. She had made her effort, and the repulse mortified and confounded her. She stood a moment, silent and wondering and affronted, and then she went to her own room and took refuge with her unknown friend and her letters; and she had the field to herself, for Ordronnaux was away again at daybreak.

Emilia began to live simply from letter to letter,—to reckon her time by them; the delay of one depressed and its hastening elated her. Presently she was modelling her thoughts and ways after the ideas and wishes that she gathered thus, looking at the universe through another's eyes; and, all the time, she was doing her utmost to be worthy of this friendship—a friendship of high

philosophy, she would have told you, since not a word had yet occurred in all these letters to put her on her guard. If a letter lingered now, she fancied her friend were ill; and she was in a flutter of apprehension till she heard; when, as many times, a heavy snow blocked the trains and no mails came, she walked the house like an unquiet ghost, realizing what it would be to her if those letters never came again, warm and flushed with an access of gratitude that they had come so long, trembling directly lest the mind she so valued should one day outgrow her and have no more to say to her at all. Poor Ordronnaux' telegrams, that from time to time were forwarded from the station, she hardly glanced at thoroughly.

One March morning there came a letter which she opened with her usual haste, and her face fell to see that, instead of the long pages of delight, there were but four lines—he was to be in that portion of the country and would delay over a train, and be that day in the light wood where he, unseen, had seen her walk, if she cared to meet him.

If she cared to meet him! She might have known how she had cared by the eager way in which the blood surged up and crimsoned all her face, by the shaking of her hands as she dressed herself hastily, without a thought of her appearance, thinking only of what she was to see, and hurrying impetuously along, for it was ten o'clock, and at ten he had said he would be there.

She entered the wood where, every day, she walked, and through which there was always a trodden path. The naked boughs let in the sunshine, and here and there the crust had thawed from the mossy stones. The red hips of the wild rose, the skeleton seed-vessels of the gerardia, the brown leaves still clinging to a young oak, the swelling buds on the trees, all gave the place a sort of stir and life, even in that nipping air. Through openings of the lichened stems, looking down over the low country, she could see the dazzle of the sunshine, and the blue melting to a soft wide blush along the far horizon and giving a pale flame-like aureole to all the pointed pines. Once in a

while a branch caught her and detained her; a black crow rose flappingly and startled her, a dark green hemlock shivered in the wind and shook down its silver weight about her. She thought nothing could be more beautiful than this walk through the yet winter wood to meet the person on whom it seemed to her now her whole world swung. She had not stopped to fasten the white fur cloak, with its black fox edgings and blue linings that she wore, her chestnut hair, gilded in the sunshine, was blown from under her hood, her cheeks were damask in the fresh wind, her eyes were glowing, her mouth was dimpled with its eager smile; she heard a footstep and half paused, her heart in her throat. Now she should see him, the one who had given a value to life, the hero whose dimly seen, dimly remembered face she had never been able to recall—and Ordronnaux came round the curve of the path, walking from the station with his knapsack on his shoulder. “Have you come to meet me?” he cried, extending his hand. “How did you know I had come? I did not telegraph,

purposely — I thought I should surprise you.” He had surprised her. And of course there was nothing to do but to turn about, half stupefied, with Ordronnaux, and walk quietly back again, gathering one dead thing and another as she choked back childish tears of disappointment. Once in her own room again, she let those tears come in a flood. A salt and bitter flood. But out of no bitterer or saltier flood was it that once before Love rose !

For, as the drops were still falling through Emilia’s fingers she snatched her hands from her face and looked about her in a sudden horror, a scorching blush tingled over her like a wave of hot air, from head to foot, her tears seemed to turn to fire, she bounded to her feet and wrung her hands, and went and hid her face, and wished that she had never been born. In one moment she had seen the precipice upon which she stood. On which she stood? Say rather the height from which she had fallen, from which she had fallen here among all corrupt things!

She dragged herself through the day, and

dressed and descended to dinner, daring to do nothing else ; and although Ordronnaux had much to talk of that was pleasant,—for he had been at Harriman's wedding, to excuse herself from which she had used the pretext of a cold,—yet never was there so long or so cruel an evening as that, before she could hide herself in darkness.

In the week that followed now, Emilia endured anguish. Forsaken, she felt, disgraced. Because aware of them herself at last, she made sure that her sensations were recognized and known by their object also. That was the reason he neither came nor made explanation, not because Ordronnaux was on the train,—for why should that have hindered him? No, she was served as she deserved. The sharpest pang of all was that—as she deserved! She dare not hope for another letter ; she was self-convicted of crime in the wish for one ; she felt that she had become a thing unfit ever to enter again into communication with the mind that seemed to her like some far white spirit. Blame for him, in the casuistry of

her love, she did not dream of; he was a friend simply and entirely; it was she, a wife, on whom all the blame must rest—how could, how could she have drifted here, how could she have so far forgotten herself as to write in the beginning! Her own self-reproach was too vivid to let her dwell on his share, or in her simplicity to remember that he was a man, in the current of the world, who knew what he was about. And yet she longed for a single word; she shivered one instant at the possibility that, after all, he might not know, might never know, and she despaired the next—*she* knew! If she had not lost already, loss, inevitable loss, only to be bridged by death, was before her, she saw. But she had not reached the point of any serious thought, everything with her yet was in the ferment of emotion. Her nerves were all alive; she started at every sound; she cringed at Ordronnaux' most quiet words; she knew what he had suffered now, and she paused, even in the midst of her pain, wishing she could make some reparation. When, in the game

of chess that he one night proposed, he took her ice-cold hand in his, to move her pawn and she felt the heat and the pulse and the tremor there, she burst into tears. But Ordronnaux seemed to take no notice of these moods — why should he, after all that had gone before?

At length, as Emilia sat, heavy-eyed and pale at the breakfast-table, hoping for nothing any more, the letters being brought in, it happened that Ordronnaux handed Emilia hers. He would have been blind not to see the wild light that suddenly ran like summer lightning through her eyes. She sat on thorns, hearing him read from one of his letters that Harriman would be there that day with Alice and Louise, and that Colonel Greve would join them by a later train; trying vainly to drink her coffee; conscious of Ordronnaux' frequent gaze until his departure warranted her own, and she could tear open her letter.

It was not the letter that Emilia had expected or hoped for. As she read it, alone in her room, her heart leaped up and almost

stifled her with its swift beatings. In the first moment she clasped it to her breast with ecstasy, in the next she had whirled it from her to the floor. But she ran and seized it again, kissed it passionately, and hurried up and down the room with it as a caged creature does, or as one might go whose feet were winged with joy.

“You see of course it was impossible to go,” he said. “And perhaps it was as well. For, let me say it,—if I had seen you come smiling towards me, your soul in your face, all eager and glad to meet me, I could not have done anything but take you to my heart! Yes, I have written it! Now you know—what yet you must have known before. I love you! I love you! I love you! Does this seem recreant? To have seen your beautiful spirit unfolding like a flower in these months, and have done otherwise, had been recreant indeed! When I think—as I do think!—that you also, you—No, it is not for me to speak. I ask nothing. Never to my gaze may the eye brighten or the cheek redden, never may I feel the dear

hair touch my face — yet with a word, a word, you can lead me out of darkness into light. But say it or not, it shall be enough for me to know that I love you and

‘ In the midmost heart of grief
My passion clasps a secret joy!’ ”

It would have been out of the question for Emilia to go down stairs again that day, but for the fact that Captain Harriman and his party were coming and she must brace herself to the exertion. And in the meantime what was she to do? Answer the letter — she could not. But as she lay on the lounge, that first fervor of her passion spent, a lock of her loosened hair fell across her neck; she rose quickly and took the scissors and severed it, and wrapping the bright and fragrant tress in an envelope, without so much as a single pencilling inside, she directed it with the usual address, and rang the bell and ordered it to be sent with the other letters to the post — nor did she know that Ordronnaux himself took the letters to the post that day on the way to meet his guests. But what

lover could have desired a dearer answer, could have had a tenderer?

She was in her wrapper still when they came, and her heart warm now to all the world, she ran flying down the stairs to receive them, though the wealth of that unbraided hair was still streaming about her, radiant with the happiness she had not yet begun to sift or search, into which realization of sin or sorrow or separation had not come, the rose burning on her cheek, the smiles wavering about her lips; and Ordronnaux, having directed Harriman, who had been there before and knew the house, to his quarters, attended them to the sitting-room, where, sooth to say, he had scarcely been before since he first brought Emilia home. There was a peculiar excitement about Ordronnaux that day—you could not tell whether it was the unquiet of joy or trouble; but Emilia had no eyes to see it. Alice and Louise flitted round the room, looking at this thing and that; Ordronnaux standing by the fireplace and once in a while stealing a look at Emilia where she sat, the moment that

any one ceased talking to her, wrapped again in her rosy dream. And presently the dressing-bell rang. "This will never do," said Ordronnaux. "Will you show Mrs. Harriman her room, Emilia — the oriel? I sent Harriman there. And Louise, you said, you would put in the south gable. I suppose Colonel Greve will be along directly, but John will take care of him."

"He was to come in the express," said Louise, "and bribe the conductor to let him off at your station."

"I shall be glad to meet him at last; he is an elusive fellow, a sort of Myth of a Man who did Supernatural things with a battery."

"Prodigies!" said Alice.

"That opens a new field," exclaimed Ordronnaux.

"'The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire.'

Ladies, you have a half hour to settle the affair and show this recluse the fashions!"

"What a perfect place, Emilia!" they cried, as she led the way to the south gable. "And how lovely you look! How happy you are!"

"It is a lonesome place," she answered, lest they should discover her confusion.

"You say that to hide yourself, Emilia!" cried Alice gayly. "Nothing is lonesome where your husband is! Oh, I could live here forever with —"

She paused, blushing, and Emilia blushed too, blushed red and redder with a stinging blush that seemed to burn and brand itself upon her. In the presence of this pure and faithful young wife she could not say a word, for she remembered the thing she had just done.

Perhaps it did not need the violet velvet that she wore to heighten the color of her cheek, when Emilia had descended to dinner, and make Ordronnaux feel a thrill coursing through him at the spectacle of her loveliness, as she stood talking with Harriman while they waited for Colonel Greve. Was it the too abundant light, was it the heat that suddenly brought a deathly pallor to blanch Emilia's face? She grasped the back of the chair beside her, her heart was giving such throbs that it seemed all the room

could hear them, she glanced at Ordronnaux in a terror to see him start and tremble and turn as white himself. For fate had found him out. The gentleman who, as the servant announced Colonel Greve, left his crutch and came forward to be presented to his host and hostess, was no other than the hero of the white rose.

Emilia bent before him, as cold and pallid that moment as a corpse. But Ordronnaux had recovered himself and was beside her, taking the Colonel's hand and welcoming him with pleasant cordiality. Then the new-comer passed to Louise. "I declare," he said under his breath, "your friend, the hostess, is the most wonderful piece of mechanism I ever saw! Is it wax or marble? You don't pretend to call it flesh and blood? Does she ever speak? It is Inez de Castro over again! Now I will tell you a secret," he said, taking her fan. "That is the rival I have held over your head! But I should hardly have known her. How did I ever dare to give her a flower! You see she has not forgiven the liberty!" And

then the butler had entered and the wonderful piece of mechanism had taken his arm and they were at the table. As Emilia raised her eyes to him a moment, she saw that he wore upon the lapel of his coat a little Scotch white rose. Ordronnaux saw it too, and he was grinding his teeth at the strange coincidences of chance while he sent the Colonel his sherry.

But if Emilia had been able to utter any words during the dinner, beyond those of simplest civility, she had no opportunity. For never had she heard or seen Ordronnaux precisely as then—it was true that circumstances never allowed it before, for gracious—or ungracious—coolness on the part of a *vis-à-vis* does not promote conversational talent. But now, as if some hidden sting urged him, jest and epigram sparkled from his lips, and even Emilia was obliged to listen and to question what ailed him, and to remember by and by

“That frail blaze
Of excellence that neighbors death,”

as, restlessly brilliant, with an artificial gayety, perhaps, that hid a trouble behind its coruscation, he kept Colonel Greve engaged so constantly that there was no possibility of his addressing an undertone to his hostess, had he desired it, until the evening ended—as it did very early, on account of the fatigues of the long journey to that place on the winter hills.

As Emilia sat on the hassock in her sitting-room, a few moments after the separation down stairs, cowering over the fallen ashes, white and cold, and totally bewildered, unable to comprehend or reconcile the events of the day, clasping her hands on her forehead with a sense that she must be going distracted, Ordronnaux rapped upon the door leading from his own rooms, and, without waiting for permission, came in. He went to the long window, and lingered there a moment, listening to the great wind that swept by, and looking out silently at the picture there—the light of the unseen moon flooding all the hollow of the sapphire sky, where the snow-clad mountain peak hung

like a giant crystal glittering in many colors on the dark.

Then he came and threw some logs upon the fire,—for though it had melted that April day in the sun, it was still winter among those hills.

As the odorous black birch began to snap and send up its jets of flame, she looked up and saw him leaning an arm upon the mantel-shelf, and gazing down at her.

“Emilia, my dear wife,” said he then, gently, “can you listen to something I have to say to you?”

She could not speak; she made a motion with her hand.

“Do you remember,” he said, “that once I swore to you to make you happy? Well—in what I have to say I want still to give you the least pain, the greatest happiness I may. I think it was early last Fall that you received a letter, without signature, from a person who, by an *equivoque*, implied that he had given you a white rose?”

She looked up heavily, as he went on, not so much astonished, perhaps, as stunned.

"You did not reply to the letter," he said; "though in response to the next one, you wore at your throat the flower you were asked to wear. And you answered the third by an attempt to end the matter."

"Yes," she said, slowly.

"But others followed. You were persuaded that you had a right to exchange letters with a friend. You thought of no imprudence. Soon you enjoyed the letters."

"Yes," she said, again.

"As your friend sketched out his plans, and hopes, and thoughts, you also confided in him. There was nothing to hide from one who knew already of your married unhappiness. You told him all the delicate imaginings and desires that had been concealed — from me, at least — that — perhaps he kindled?"

"Yes!" she said again.

"As you so hesitatingly, and then so freely, revealed to him the reserves of your nature, that friend became your lover. He appointed a day to meet you. With disappointment you met only me."

"Yes," she said.

"A week afterward you received from him a passionate declaration. That was this morning. And your reply —"

"Do not think," she said, stolidly, with her dry lips, "that I should not in time have told you all this."

"And do not think that I should have troubled you about it. I do not know," said Ordronnaux, leaving her and walking up and down after his habit, "I cannot say how it would have ended; but for the accident to-night of this man and his accursed white rose, this man whom I recognized and whom you did, as the one who dropped his flower on your book." He came back and stood before her again. "Once you playfully declared that you had a confession to make," said he, "and I answered that it was I who should make confession. Are you listening? Emilia, it was I that wrote you the letters."

She lifted her head, and stared at him a moment. "It is impossible," she said.

"No," said Ordronnaux, advancing a step,

with a flush on his dark face. "It is not impossible. It is true. When I recovered from the illness in which what I had endured all summer ended, I felt that my love for you had burned out, and that if I kept the ashes warm with a pleasant indifference, it was as much as I could hope. And then, as I saw you pursuing a cold precision of duty, I wondered if you suffered no pang of reproach, of pity, if you had reason to be satisfied with yourself. I resolved to test you. I wrote you the first letter —"

"I do not believe you!" she cried. "It was not your handwriting!"

"You never saw my handwriting, Emilia. You never saw my handwriting other than in those letters. I always telegraphed you, if you will remember. I swear to you I wrote them —"

She sprang up and stood before him, trembling from head to foot.

"Pray, hear the whole," cried Ordronnaux. And he took her hands and gently placed her in the great arm-chair that he wheeled where the flicker of the firelight

fell on her with all the wild beauty of that changing spot on her cheek, that fixed lustre in her eye, that quiver on her lip.

“I will tell you the truth,” he said. “I was sorry when you came to the greenhouse and took that white rose from me.” He paused a moment, lifting one thing and another from the shelf and putting it down again, as he leaned over the blaze, and did not look at her.

“And then I was reckless,” he continued. “I said I would see it through. I would see what you were made of. It could do me no harm. Perhaps I thought —” he faltered; “yes, perhaps I was so base,” he said, slowly, “as to think that if the bond that had loosened grew irksome, here would be the means of destroying it in my own hand. Yet that was but momentary, a momentary madness. When your first letter came,—that little, heart-broken letter,—it touched me. I had the world before me; you had nothing. I said to myself I would lighten your days a little, if any human interest could do it; and so I wrote. And

then — you know the rest,” said Ordronaux, “As week by week those letters unfolded all your spirit, and I had the very bloom of your being there, the love that had died for your fair face, your lips, your smile, was born again for the sweet soul that I was discovering. This morning, this very morning, I handed you the letter which contained the avowal of that love. This morning I had your reply.” And he drew from his breast the long lock of bright brown hair, and pressed it to his lips.

Emilia reached forward, and snatched it from his hand and threw it on the fire. The flame caught it, and it curled and writhed, snake-like, to a cinder.

“What do I care?” cried Ordronaux, imperiously. “You love me. At last I know you love me!” And he bent toward her with his open arms.

“Never!” cried Emilia, drawing doggedly away. “Never! If what you say is true, you have killed the man I loved! I never loved a man who was capable of practising a fraud!”

Ordronnaux rose, and stood as if a blow had been dealt him. "You are right," he said, hoarsely, after a while. "Before God, Emilia, I never looked at it so till now. I should have told you that fraud and an Ordronnaux —"

"Yes," she cried, suddenly, "a fraud! Oh, all you dead and gone Ordronnaux that from these walls have been accusing me of crime this long, long week, now you see where all your boasted honor ends! Ends in the man who beguiles his own wife from virtue, and betrays her!"

There was a moment's silence, in which you heard the drop drip from the eaves.

"Emilia," said Ordronnaux then, still gently. "If I have done wrong, are you the one to have no mercy on me?"

Another silence, and then for answer there came a tempest of tears.

"Is it true," said he, when the tears had passed, and there had been no sound in the room save the keening of the wind and the falling and shattering of one icicle and another for many minutes, "is it true that I

have killed your ideal? Is there nothing left from which you can revive it? No love of beauty and of heaven? No aspiration? No sympathy in books, in music, in color? No personal interest whatever? After this winter's companionship in those letters, can you live alone and live at all? I loved your soul, Emilia — I thought that you loved mine !”

He turned away. And then he came back passionately. He stooped and took her, impassive, in his arms, he kissed her unreturning lips in one long throbbing kiss — a kiss that was half a sob. Then he released her and went back to the window, where he had lingered when he first came in.

The room suffocated him, it seemed as if his brain were on fire, he threw open the valves and stepped out upon the little balcony — an instant too soon. For there came the swift rush and muffled thunder of an avalanche of snow and ponderous icicle from the gable-end above, and Emilia saw Ordronnaux fall beneath the shock, saw him as if that, like all the rest, were a part of some bad dream.

But with the next heart-beat,—whether it were an instinct of common humanity that stirred in her, or whether that long melting kiss had warmed her back to newer, richer life,—she started from her chair, and had seized Ordronnaux' shoulders and had dragged him in, the snow with him, had flung together the valves of the window behind him, and was kneeling over him while the flashing of the firelight disclosed to her the white sharp face as fixed as death, whiter for the thread of blood that trickled from a wound beneath the hair.

In that instant a withering sense may have overwhelmed her of what she lost in losing Ordronnaux—the companionship, the sympathy, the love of which he spoke. “I loved your soul, too!” she cried out. “Speak to me, look at me! You kissed me a moment since,” she said, her face on his, “kiss me again, oh Ordronnaux, my love, my husband!”

A quiver crept through the frame she half upheld.

Even in that trance, the twin of death, he must have felt that cry.

His pulse fluttered, his heart was beating in great plunges — yet he dared not open his eyes at once, lest it should all be naught, till again he felt the touch of that soft cheek, of those warm, trembling lips, and his own lips answered and detained them.

The moon came round with all her purple shadows, and looked at them sitting there before the dying embers, in that rapturous hour of recital, of forgiveness, of passion — an hour borrowing something of its bliss from the sorrow it had so nearly touched, from the sorrow yet to come! On what a bright world the sun would rise, they thought! What messages of cheer, though the household were about them, would flash between the eyes of husband and of wife conscious of the glad new secret of their happiness! What a future splendid with hope, rich with possession stretched before them!

“I must forgive you,” said Emilia, pushing back the bright fallen hair. “Yet, oh! how can you forgive me! It was such a fatal flaw in me — I see it all now — I was

so ignorant! But your love must be to me like God's love — ”

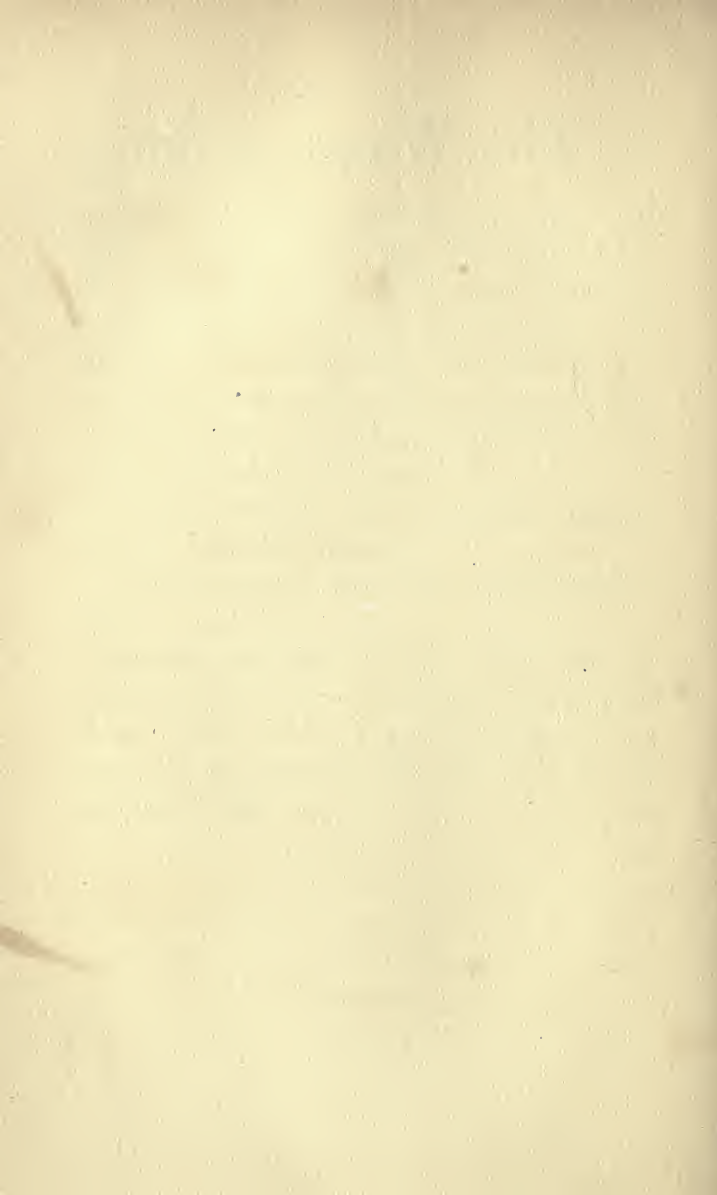
“And it was no fatal flaw in me?” he cried. “Oh, my darling, the forgiving is all done before we reach heaven! Do you know, Emilia, when you recalled me to life there, a little while ago, with that kiss,—that kiss, my wife, that led me out of darkness into light,—I said to myself that I was dead, that I was in heaven.”

“You thought you deserved heaven then?” she said archly,

“At any rate, I have it!” cried Ordronnaux.

And let us hope he had. For the icy spear had done its work, its slow and hidden work. And, as his head fell forward with those words, the man who held her in his arms was dead.

The Wages of Sin



The Wages of Sin



THE brook trickled down from the pass of the hills, a slender stream that you could step across, curving and looping, scattering diamonds, taking the sun in its brown shallows. Springs bubbled up along the way to feed it, and trout flashed their red-jewelled sides in its pools, other brooks swelled it to a stream, birches bordered it, willows dipped in it, pine trees darkened it, marsh-mallows lighted its coves, arrow-heads and the scarlet cardinals saw themselves painted there, and in their turn the fringed gentians lifted their deep blue to match the blue it mirrored. And when the lucid ice sheathed it, and the snow powdered it, Judith Dauntry could still hear it tinkling below, as it wound its way about the farm that was hers, and made its boundary. Such

as it was, it was the only friend she had in the world.

She sat high up in the pass, one gray day, on the stone from under which the brook bubbled, and looked down the long valley over a wide and wild and lonely country — a drear and desolate country in the dun hues of late autumn, arched by an immensity of gray wind-driven clouds. What did she and her pain signify in all this wide hollow of earth and sky? A mote in the immensity, a sigh melting into the clouds — something that would pass as all pain passes. Another woman had perhaps sat here with her own pain long and long ago — and who knew of it, who remembered it? It was as if it had never been. But for Judith now the pain swelled and filled the whole space; there was nothing but pain in the world.

A watery sunshine struggled through the clouds, just as a man came round the thicket and climbed up toward her, a tall and slender stooping shape, at the sight of which the tears sprang and blinded her so that she saw neither sunshine nor lover. But they

were not tears for herself. Her own pain was too deep and dry and hard for tears. They were the tears of something like an infinite compassion for this poor creature who asked bread of her. And should she give him a stone?

He sat down beside her in silence. Presently his arm stole round her; and she laid her head back with a swift sob that tore its way up in spite of her.

"Is it as bad as that?" he said.

"It's giving up everything," she answered, without moving. "People, friends, meeting, the minister — good name. And before long you — you — will believe evil of me, too."

"I! You think so!"

He felt her shudder. "We are the same thing," he said hotly. "We give up the world. We can get along without it. You are worth the world to me! Besides," he added presently, and more slowly, "it isn't as if it was not right in the sight of God —"

"Don't bring God into it," she cried pas-

sionately, lifting her head, and tossing the loose and long black hair out of her eyes, "now, or ever! We are giving up this world. And we are giving up the other. Oh, my God! I can never say my prayers again!" And she stood up, her hands pressed to her eyes as if they would shut out light forever.

He stood up, too. "Well," he said. "That's all. It shan't be. I'll go back — back to hell." He wavered a moment. The sun burst out of the cloud and gilded his hair, thin pale hair like a child's, blowing about the face, the face that was weak and wistful, with strange, soft, beautiful eyes. "Yes," he said. "I'll go back to warming my feet in the moonshine. I can rub along with Esther. And if I can't — there's always water in the river. As for the child — it's better than nothing."

"Than nothing," she said.

He looked at her, a sort of sullen sadness in his eyes. "I'll break your heart if I stay," he said.

"And you'll break it if you go!" she

cried. And she moved swiftly, and threw her arms about him and pressed her lips on his. "No, no, no!" she cried, between her kisses. "It is all over. It is done. We shall always have each other. What do we care for any one else! Heaven—it is a dream, a fable! It will be heaven to be together. And after that, sleep!"

"In one grave."

"Oh, why do you speak of graves?" she exclaimed, with a vehement gesture.

"Because it would be better if you were in yours now, as every one would say."

"Very well. Let us say the worst that can be said. Let us call it a grave. But we are together in it. We shall always be together. See, the sun has come out," she cried between her passionate embraces. "I take it for a sign. It was so dreary a moment since, and now, look!" and she pointed down the reaches of dun gold and misty violet along the great plain. "It is like a valley in Eden."

"And we the first man and woman."

"Do you know where we are? It is

the old Stone of Sacrifice of the Sachems." She stooped, and laid her hand upon it. "I, Judith Dauntry," she said, "promise you, Ellis Goff, the faithfulness, the obedience, of my life!"

He bent, too, and laid his hand, cold and trembling, over hers. "And I, Ellis Goff, take the sacrifice," he said.

And if a more bleeding sacrifice were never laid upon the stone, neither whispered the thought of it. As she straightened herself and gazed at him, with the new gladness in her eyes, the sun transfigured all her tall and shapely being into a thing of majestic beauty, lingered in the brown depths of her eyes, gave her face a bloom, the edges of her lips a scarlet transparence, and made her smile a radiance. "Come, now," she said, gathering her cloak, and clasping his hand.

She stepped across the brook, and paused over the pool where the vertical sunbeams turned the pebbles at bottom into live jewels — a ruby, an emerald, an amethyst — flashing up through the clear depth. She released her grasp, and kneeled down, and

dipped both hands in the pure water. "See!" she said, "I wash off all the old days, the old faiths, the old ways. It is a baptism into the new—no, the old, the very old! Dip your hands in, too, Ellis! Now we go back to nature."

She did not notice that the sun went in and left only gray pebbles at the bottom of the pool. She forgot her sorrows, her fears, her doubts, her misery of the morning. She went along in the sudden blaze of a joy burning itself out as swiftly as intensely.

So they followed the brook's way till it skirted the edge of Harden Hill, and suddenly with rapids and falls dipped into the valley, where they lost sight of the source and the great plain and saw only the ring of hills and the farm, around one promontory of which the brook washed before it wound again about the base of the hills and went down and past the town to find the river and at last the embracing sea.

Through the cut of the hills one saw the sparkle of the spire below; no other dwelling was in sight; the wooded slopes en-

circled the spot like giants lying at their ease. Here in the dimple of rich land before them lay Judith Dauntry's home, and their prison.

The farm filled the hollow; except for garden-spots, when it became hers Judith had it laid down to grass. She had a little money at interest, left her with the farm by her parents, who had come from England and settled here. They had nothing else, these two; for Ellis had given Esther his own house, and she had sold it and gone with her child to her mother — perhaps with the vague hope that he would follow her when the spell that Judith Dauntry had cast upon him should come to naught. He had been living in a hut in the woods since then.

But the two understood what was before them. They would expose themselves to the retribution of insult no more than was unavoidable. A wandering factor had always bought the standing grass; the garden-plots would give them vegetables sufficient for the year; there were maples in the wood-lot for their sugar; and for the rest

there were the domestic animals, and there were a few sheep on the hillside whose fleeces Judith would spin and weave; and with this they would be nearly independent of the world. At present they had clothes; and when anything further was needed it was not impossible for Ellis to make a detour through the woods and over the hills to places where he was unknown. Once a year must Judith confront the human race: when she went to draw her pittance of money. And so they began the long days and nights.

Judith gave herself no time to think. She would have the low, dark rooms pleasant for Ellis. She found long evergreen trailers; and she brought the forest she had loved into the house with great hemlock boughs, not knowing that to Ellis, whose nature was that to which companionship, people and the gay side of life are sympathetic, the forest and its gloom and awesomeness only accented trouble. She put his clothes in order, singing all day long; she made him savory dishes, and filled his pipe;

and wherever she was in the house on the dark and dour November days sunshine seemed to follow her.

For a while, too, he met her on this plane. It was a long day-dream of joy. They looked neither backward nor forward; they were in a radiant present, indifferent as the madman to whom it matters not though palaces fall and continents crumble while he plays with straws in the sunshine. If into this day-dream there crept the least faint suffusion of something like nightmare—I know not what—perhaps an unrecognized sense each of wrong to the other—neither at first perceived it. But it spread like the shadow of a sailing cloud; it never lifted; and it darkened now and then to gloom. It was some time before Judith in her own deep content observed that the smile on his face had become a seldom thing. It did not fairly enter her perception till the night of the charivari.

It had taken many weeks for the virtue of the town below to discover and realize and resent the outrage that had been done

it. But at last it had become penetrated with the consciousness of sin in the neighborhood; and it had taken punishment into its own hands.

It was in the dead of the winter night, in the middle of the January thaw, that Judith waked with hideous cries and fierce discords of blaring horns rending the air about her. As soon as she could move, for the beating of her heart, she crept to the window and through the crack of the curtain looked out on a mob of men and boys, hooting and hallooing, beating on drums and gongs, blowing fish-horns, singing ribald songs, uttering derisive yells, filling all the place with an incredible foulness of outcry. Perhaps it was the fit way to characterize guilt—it seemed to Judith suddenly as if she were the virtue and they were the vice. She went back, and took Ellis in her arms, and lay there feeling the long shudders that swept him from head to foot. She did not kiss him, or caress him. All at once she knew that her kiss or caress at that moment would be hateful to him. She only held his

head upon her breast, and clasped him closer as insult after insult struck her, and vile words pierced her ears like stabs. And she felt him cower as she held him.

How long the ordeal might have lasted, one cannot say ; but the south wind blowing down the gap brought with it a burst of rain ; and in the chill and soaking shower the crowd melted away.

But neither Judith nor her lover stirred or spoke for many hours. They lay awake till the dark winter dawn, she with thrills of apprehension and of defiance that were agony, he blenching and horror-struck. Then the white light struck up the ceiling, and they saw that the rain had turned to snow, and a merciful pure mantle covered all signs of the night. "I have been the means of your enduring this !" he said. And then he shook with a torrent of tears as fierce as the sleet that whipped the pane ; and she sat beside him, and lifted his head to her shoulder, and hushed him, pouring over him the calmness of her courage.

"If we go away ?" she said, half unwillingly.

"Where will we go that our guilt will not go, too?" he cried.

But by and by he slept. And when he came down the fire was sparkling, and the coffee was hot, and there was work to do; and presently anger took the place of fear, and dulness finally scarred the wounds both of anger and of grief.

"If Esther should get a divorce—" he said, as they sat beside the hearth a few nights later, the fire glancing over Judith's sumptuous red and brown colors brightening his white face into something ethereal before her eyes.

"Would you ask her!" said Judith. "Would you accept mercy at her hands!"

"Then we could marry!" the whelp urged.

"And with no sin?" asked Judith, laughing bitterly. "We will not deceive ourselves, at any rate. The sin would be the same, even if it were legalized. Divorce simply makes sin lawful. And then it is called by another name. It is the same still, only it ceases to be a crime because it ceases to be against law."

"At all events it would be obeying the law."

"I have no voice in making the law, why should I obey it?"

"I had a voice, though," said Ellis.

"And what are we saying anyway?" cried Judith, joyously. "We agreed that sin had no part in us, that we were returning to nature!"

"Well, well," he added presently, "we can sell the farm."

"No one will buy it," Judith replied.

"Then we can leave it, and go seek our fortunes."

"On the road? You are fit for it!" cried Judith, her blood up, her resentment fired. "No; we will stay here. Come what will, we have our rights here. If we have done wrong, we will take our punishment here."

Perhaps she wished him to say they had done no wrong. But he was silent. And Judith had already begun to take her punishment.

The mood passed, however, with the

storm. And Ellis found his fiddle and played out his dreams ; and as she listened and gazed at him, grown white and thin, with the melancholy droop of the eye, what was still any remembrance of home or any hope of heaven ? When, the old violin laid aside, Judith sat at his feet before the fire, as his arm lay on her shoulder, she felt her soul go out of her with his kiss upon her mouth ; and while he gazed at the proud outlines and the rich colors of her face and at the soft darkening of her glowing eyes brimming with tenderness, here was home, and here was heaven, and their love justified itself to him.

At last the soft spring weather came, with high light in the pale azure, with the gleam upon the hills like a shimmer of green sunshine far and wide, with the murmur of innumerable water-courses, with a heaven full of perfumed air. And then there was much to do out of doors, and she helped him in the garden-plots and in the fields, and she set out her plants and slipped them and made the flower-beds. And the smile came

back to his face and the song to his lip, and the cunning to his hand upon the strings; and they sat at night upon the doorstone in the cool sweet dark and heard the shrill piping of frogs, and the murmurs far away among the hills, and felt themselves a part of the great world of wonder of the night, and forgot the world that was well lost.

Dusk and dawn now for many days it had been hot and dry; and the corn was high in the field, when the virtue of the town happened to remember itself, and a crowd, led largely by the need of excitement and the inherent love of baiting the defenceless, visited the farm, with horns and cat-calls, as before, with showers of stones and clamor of obscene railing. When the mob had gone there was hardly a whole pane of glass left in the house, the live stock were scared away, the corn was trodden into the soil, and the fire that had destroyed the crop of grass was still pouring down the slope in billows to be quenched only in the brook.

It chanced that Judith and Ellis heard the rout coming, and had time to escape to

a secure hiding-place in the wood. When at daybreak they returned to the desolated place, Judith's indignation was at a white heat. "We pay our tax!" she cried. "And we have a right to protection. I will go to the selectmen and demand reparation!"

"Better let sleeping dogs lie," said Ellis. "If those people chose they could put us in the state-prison. We can claim nothing of the law. We live in defiance of law." And there was something hard and glittering in his eye.

"Oh!" cried Judith, "you regret it!"

"I regret nothing," said he.

"Nothing!" she repeated with a note of joy. "As for their law," she said presently, "it is the thought and will of people a hundred years ago. Why should we be governed by the whim of men dead for a century and less wise than we when living? We are a law to ourselves! — And the grass will grow again," she added. She had a sort of angry joy, as if she took sides with martyrdom, while tramping wood and

meadow with Ellis to find the cows, to see the chickens one by one come home to roost, waiting on him as he reset the panes of glass.

When all was done, a few evenings later, they sat at the brookside where the stream bayed out before winding round the head of the farm, and watched the night fall softly through the flush of the sunset painted there. For the only good fortune of these two was that nature seemed to melt into their condition, to be their friend and their consolation—they in some way uncertain of being all in all to each other, she uncertain of his respect, he uncertain of her long allegiance. They lingered there as if they dreaded going up to the house, as if while they were out of doors they were like the other wild things of the outdoor state and subject to no laws but those of unfettered life. He rubbed his hands in the bayberry growing there, in order to remove the scent of the material with which he had been working. "It is only to do again," he said. "It would be better

—it would be better—if we had gone away.”

“Perhaps so. In the first place,” said Judith, remembering that once she had half suggested it.

“Then no one would have known; and we should not be outcasts. We are outcasts, Judith.”

“I do not mind that, if you do not. And if we had gone in the beginning—But now, never!” cried Judith. “I will not be driven by wretches like that from my father’s house, from my own dwelling! They have filled me with hate where there was nothing but kindness. Let them look at their own sins!”

“And hate,” said Ellis, “is suffering.”

“You loved the world, the people of the world, more than I did,” she said.

“Yes,” he answered, “but I love you more than them.”

And silently they stayed there under the stars, in the midnight and the dew, half dreaming, half awake, in each other’s arms, the dank and fragrant wind blowing over

them as it blows over graves, till the summer night was wearing itself away to dawn.

The two had but little more than repaired the mischief of the last raid when they were again assailed by that element of the town which found the thing not only good sport but a sort of sop to conscience. This time they caught Ellis before he could make shelter. Possibly they had not meant to burn any of the buildings, but, their tar taking fire, the burning barn, with its occupants, lighted them upon their hideous work. They were satisfied when it was done; and they left in a straggling body, singing songs that echoed into the firmament that had blenched before the flames which Judith, from her nook among the reeds, saw red within the brook, as if the brook rolled blood.

The horrible object that was creeping feebly away to the forest, and that Judith found and brought home, by that time utterly overcome, bore no more resemblance to Ellis Goff than any shapeless viscous mass does to an ivory sculpture. In the midst

of her anguish she remembered a picture she had seen of some foul harpy. But she did her best, swiftly and silently, with stimulants, with warmth, with shards, laboring all night and day and night again, till he was able to help himself, and nursing him through the long illness of wounds and bruises and shattered nerves. He was dearer to her than ever now. He needed her. And if the poetry had gone out of her love, there was in it the fierceness of tenderness, the passion of protection, that a she-lion may feel for her cub.

One day Judith had gone wandering barefoot down the bed of the brook, looking for leeches, having fancied they might be of use to Ellis in his headaches. Just where the shallows ended, some children were picking berries from the bushes on the banks and pulling water-cresses from among the stream-washed pebbles. Judith, still in the water, stood and watched them for a moment. Presently one of them ran to her with a stem of berries, offering them. "You must not eat those!" cried Judith. "They are poison!"

The child, who had been attracted perhaps by the brown and gold sunshine of Judith's face, perhaps through some congenital force, a little abashed now by the rebuff, turned to run, when Judith put out a hand to detain her and to look in the rosy dimpled face where the blue eyes beamed from a tangle of long brown lashes. "What is your name?" she asked.

"Ellie Goff," was the reply. "We have run away," said the child, with a sweet infantile accent. "There is a bad woman up here, and we have come to see her."

Judith for an instant, half a heart-beat, felt as if an adder had stung her. And then the blood stormed up and darkened her eyes as she gazed. She did not heed the words much, after the first blenching. She did not give the child's mother a thought. It was Ellis's child. Suddenly she snatched the child in her arms, and held her to her heart and kissed the little frightened mouth, and set her down and hurried away so quickly, the water plashing about her, that she seemed to vanish. But from that time

Judith felt an emptiness, a strange aching want, not for anything that had gone out of her life, but for something that would never come into it.

Ellis was still very weak and ill when the minister came up the brookside, finding no one in the house, and saw Judith sitting beside the bed that she had heaped of hemlock boughs out there, and on which Ellis lay like a white shadow.

The severity with which the good man was steeled melted a little at the sight. Then his long-stimulated sense of right and righteousness revolted against the pity. "Ellis Goff!" he said sternly. "Where are your wife and child?"

Ellis Goff looked at him. But there was not a ray of recognition in the pale eyes.

"You see," said Judith, her dark face now colorless with waiting and watching and wrath, "to what you and your sort have brought him!"

"Judith Dauntry," said the minister, "I see to what your and his sin has brought him." Then after a moment, and with a

second thought, he added: "But I did not come to accuse you. I came to help you — if I might."

"You are very good," said Judith, from all the height of her fault. "We do not need your help."

"You need it very much," said the minister gently. "No one has ever needed it more."

"Very well," said Judith, the color now sweeping over her face till it looked like a flower in the sun. "We decline to receive it. Be so good as to go away."

And then, as he did not turn, she stooped and took Ellis in her strong arms. "If you do not go, you will drive us out of the light and air," she said.

It seemed impossible to the minister, as he looked at the splendid creature suddenly flaming there, that she could be a thing of shame. She was, rather, like some great angel of succor to the suffering. Not like those forces of Death and Sleep bearing off Sarpedon of which he had lately been reading, but like an emanation of light and life.

Except so far as earth is beautiful, the earthly and the animal had no part in her just then.

“No,” said he, “let me stay a little while. That is too big a burden for you. Put him down. If I talk with you I will not offend you.” And he seated himself on the rock where the brook’s spray in seasons of flood had thickened the moss to a velvet carpet.

No one spoke for a time. The sky soared far and blue, a soft wind blew through it, birds darted here and there in it; swallows skimmed across the pools that answered the gleam of their wings with a sword-blue shimmer; only the bubbling of the brook broke the sweet stillness, running on all unaware of anything but feeding springs and bending heavens and calling seas.

“Judith,” said the minister at last, “I knew your father and mother. I gave them the bread of communion. I christened you. If you care nothing for their good name, nor for the Lord above us all, at least you must know that the life you are living is—small though the consideration be—a reproach to my work among my people.”

"I live my own life," said Judith, holding her head haughtily, although her eyes were lowered under their heavy white lids.

"No one lives his life alone. The world is on one side of us, the law of God upon the other."

"Love is the fulfilling of the law," said Judith with a sudden lightning of the eyes.

"You take the word profanely on your lips. Do you think that means such love as yours and his?"

Judith turned and gazed at the white, still being on the dark hemlock boughs, her heart swelling with a surging tenderness. "Oh," she murmured to herself, "God can yearn to his creation in no other way than I yearn toward him!" But she said nothing aloud.

"You know," said the minister, still gently, "that the love referred to is that of man to man, of God in man, which makes the common weal, the good of the community —"

"The community!" exclaimed Judith, facing him with an infinite disdain. "The people

who destroy crops, who burn buildings with the animals in them, singing vile songs, calling vile names, subjecting a man like Ellis — one known among them — to the most infamous torture short of crucifixion — making him what you see him! No. I came out from that community. I left it, thank God! I want nothing of it.”

“And you want everything,” said the minister — “its science, its medicine, its help, its sympathy.”

“I ask nothing of it but that it shall let me alone. I will have — I swear it! I swear it by his sufferings! — neither its forgiveness nor its forbearance —”

“Then it cannot let you alone.”

“I curse it!” said Judith, lifting her arms high in imprecation. “I curse it from the bottom of my heart!”

And the minister went away. And Judith sat through the great noon stillness, too much of a tumult in her soul to feel anything of the brooding power in that

“Eternal sky
Full of light and of deity,”

watching the brook go by sweeping all its enamel of damascene blue with it, a new misery coming with the thought that so life as well was flowing by to some great end where she and Ellis might be sundered as widely apart as any two drops of the spray that flashed and foamed where the stream rippled round the rock and sung him now to sleep.

But the brook always brought her comfort; she saw the two drops melting into one, and she smiled, changing the shadow of the screening boughs as the light shifted. She kneeled and held his thin hand above her heart, feeling that she fought any fate that would come between them. Then she went up to the house and brought down his food and her own—and she sat watching him through the wheeling hours without a conscious sensation other than of aching tenderness.

It was the next Sunday that the minister preached a sermon on the rights of the individual sinner, which perhaps he did not very well understand himself; which certainly his

people did not understand ; but the spirit of which was like an atmosphere of mercy. And occupied, perhaps, with their own iniquities, the townspeople left Ellis and Judith to theirs.

The minister, indeed, came up again ; but no one appeared. Under cover of darkness, too, he brought medicines and strengthening things for Ellis. He found them afterward where he had left them, with the book, with the newspaper, untouched. And in a melancholy dissatisfaction with himself, in an angry rancor against sin, and a dark foreboding for them, he left them to their own devices.

The doctor, a young man full of enthusiasms, was not so easily repulsed. "I am not sure," he said to Judith, "that I am doing you a kindness. But humanity requires it. Now he will live. And that signifies — ?"

"Oh, all heaven and earth !" she answered passionately.

"Is it really then so much worth while to you ?"

"It is worth the whole of life and of eternity!" she cried, lifting her great solemn eyes.

"Upon my word," he said, "I may understand the theory and practice of medicine, but I do not understand you. What is there in this man—I think I have earned the right to ask—that you should give up everything life has to offer for the sake of coming into this prison with him?"

"I have not found it a prison."

"You will!"

"As it may be."

"You are under an infatuation, a madness," said the doctor, still probing the sore. "You should be saved from it. You were worth saving once. If Ellis Goff were stronger, finer, not all worthless— But then he would not be here. He has betrayed his wife, abandoned his child, played false to his friends. A weakling, idle, self-indulgent—"

"You have done all you can for him?"

"Oh, yes. There is nothing left but to follow the regimen I have given."

"There is your fee, then. My obliga-

tion for your work has forced me to listen so far. But no more."

And the doctor went out, leaving the fee behind him, as if he had been dismissed from an offended royal presence.

Now and then, partly through the divine kindness of his profession, partly through human interest and curiosity, he came again, but never to suggest to her that Ellis Goff was not a prince among men, and always to feel that she regarded himself impersonally as an instrument of health, like air or light, not as one with whom shame, anger, or forgiveness had any place or part.

But forgiveness was rarely in her thoughts. One morning, indeed, when the climbing rose that her mother had brought from the home in the old country was in bloom, full of fragrance, thrusting out its countless sprays, and a trailer had caught her gown as if one stretched a hand to take her, and the flower with the dew still on it brushed its velvet against her cheek and breathed its breath on her lips, the face of her mother seemed to swim like an apparition before

her, and the knowledge of what her mother's thoughts concerning her must be wrapped her in one instant like a flame. She threw her arms about the rose, thorns and all, and bowed her head upon them and cried, till Ellis's voice in the distance, weak and ailing, recalled her to the present.

Once a year in her camlet cloak and her hood, Judith went down to the post-office, at the time her small interest money was due, went to the savings-bank and drew the slender dividend, went to the town hall and paid her tax, her head high, her eye level, the color burning on her dark cheek; and she returned by the path along the brook, where Ellis came to meet her. At sight of him she threw off her proud demeanor as if it had been a coat of mail, and went back with his hand in hers. "Who saw you, Judith?" once he asked tremulously.

"No one," she answered calmly, "but the business men, the machines."

She did not tell him that she had heard the exclamation, "My God! Can that be Judith Dauntry!" But she paused by a

still, dark cove of the brook, and with a sunbeam striking her, hung over it a moment to see the red and gold splendor of her reflection, the grace of line and curve, the lustre of glance and smile. "Yes," she said to herself, as she replaced her hood, "it is Judith Dauntry. And all that she was in the eyes of Ellis Goff she is still."

Many a time after that in their rambles did she pause to look at herself in one of the brook's pools, through the sudden fear that there was some change in the beauty that the little looking-glass of the house failed to give, so indifferent Ellis strangely seemed, so rapt in thoughts other than any thought of her, so like a person far away from home.

Time passed; Ellis played on the old fiddle still — dreams, listless melodies, tuneless wanderings; often, too, with a false note that he failed to mind. He spoke little, and he strayed off into the woods, and was sometimes gone for more than the day, coming home dazed and limp and useless. Often in the night he woke with a cold

sweat of terror, the sound of the old horns and cries in his ears, clasping her, imploring her protection. So seldom had his endearments grown that even these moments gave her a sort of fearful joy while she held him in her strong young arms and soothed and hushed him off to sleep again.

It became evident to Judith, by and by, that that last dreadful night had wrought Ellis a wrong from which he was not to recover — as if he felt himself to be the thing his torturers had made him. The abasement of it had become his. She had brought it upon him, she said; and her defiance of the world sank before the fact.

She resolved, although but vaguely, that they should go away now, as soon as the means could be compassed. A change of base, a new existence, might revive the intelligence that had failed with self-respect. And she began to spare from their small income, pinching and starving and living on the hope of it. But as soon as the little money was saved it had to be spent, after Judith's long tramp across the hill and dusty

highway to the town where she was not known, for something necessary to Ellis's recovery. Season after season passed, and they were still there.

One day Ellis came home from a day and night's ramble in the woods of Harden Hill. He had met some charcoal-burners there and had made fellowship with them. Now he staggered up the grass, and fell across the doorstep. She ran to raise him: but for her long habit of care she would have dropped him as quickly, in his malodorous and revolting condition. The contents of their jugs had been urged upon him till he was beside himself. Presently the experience was repeated. When she went for the little hoard of money it was gone. When the thing had happened the third time, she ceased to save a penny. It was, however, a rare occurrence afterward; but she never felt entirely safe except when she had left him asleep and had come down at night to the brookside to be alone with the stars. In some strange way the murmuring of the brook seemed always the voice of a friend.

“See,” it said then, “when I am still I mirror the stars of heaven. Be still, too. Some time I shall find the great sea, and the mighty crests will take me, and I shall know myself no more.” Alas! It had come to this! Still in the flush of youth, still living, still loving, she was looking to death as a refuge. Often, of a summer morning, she took her work out to the brookside; the busy babble of the water gave them both a sense of the stir of the world. Fortunate brook, it was going somewhere! Often there was no work; and while Ellis thought he angled for trout, she idly dreamed disjointed dreams — for she might not think of that past before Ellis came into her life; and there was no future. More often than otherwise the texts her father had used to read aloud would start up in her memory, texts that in those days had meant nothing to her, and now meant an unformed terror. “I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee,” she said. And then the bitter words recurred to her memory: “Thou shalt drink of thy sister’s

cup, deep and large — it containeth much — thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of abomination and desolation.” The intense luxuriance of green in leaf and bough, the crystal floods of light, the singing wind, the billowing fragrances and woody spices; the redundancy of life in all the springing, growing summer, no longer gladdened her, it made her tremble. “When the whole earth rejoiceth I will make thee desolate !” she said.

Ellis did no work now ; Judith did it all, outdoors and within. If she grew hard and sinewy and old before her time, there was none to see but Ellis — and did he care ? In the summers he went to bed like a child, at nightfall ; and she sat on the sunken doorstep, sometimes thinking bitter thoughts, sometimes a sweet memory touching her in the dark like a wandering perfume, sometimes her mind as empty as the vast dusk across which the bats flitted indistinctly. Of a winter night he slept in his chair, and she mended their clothes on the other side of the fire. And it came about

at last that observing him, thin, pallid, vacant, she felt the bounding fulness of her own life, and saw as plainly as if it were before her eyes that the bubble she had grasped had broken between her fingers.

It made no difference. If it were not the old passionate love, it was pity. And the pity was a pain. And the pity was all he needed.

"You treat me like a child," he said petulantly at some precaution she took.

"Well; it is good to be a child," she answered.

"Yes. I should like to be a child again. I should not do just as I have done," he said, after a moment. "Perhaps I should not be here. Would you be here again, Judith?"

"Yes," said Judith.

"I don't suppose any one would call you a good woman, Judith?" then he asked plaintively.

"No," said Judith. But her eyes darkened.

"Then it doesn't matter if I wouldn't do as you would?"

"Nothing matters now," said Judith.

"Are you angry, Judith? They used to say you had a temper. Do you remember the dance when all the men wanted to dance with you so that you thought they were making game, and it affronted you, and you started for home alone, and I ran after and went along with you? I could, you know. I was a married man. And they drank your health at the supper afterward. 'Judith Dauntry!' Ross Marvin said. 'A name to conjure with!' And Ben Turner called out, 'Don't use that name too freely!' And of course the girls didn't like it. 'Unless you want to see a pair of black eyes flash lightning!' said Ann Talbot. Judith Dauntry had black eyes, you know. That was in the good old days. Yes, that night was the beginning, Judith. Your father was at the gate — he was a good man —"

"Don't!" cried Judith sharply.

"Don't what? — He died next year. Yes. Sometimes, do you know, Judith, I seem to myself like another man. It's a long while ago, isn't it? There was a woman named

Esther — Judith! wasn't Ross Marvin, wasn't Ben Turner, with the men that came up here one black night? There was a black night? It wasn't a dream, a nightmare, was it, Judith? Oh, Judith, come here, take hold of me, help me!" And until he forgot himself again Judith comforted him as a mother comforts her nursling.

One summer crept by after another. There was nothing by which to tell this winter from the last. They saw no people, except the chance wayfarer or the charcoal-burners; they had no newspaper; no whisper of the way the world went came to them. The minister died; Esther died; they never heard of it. A pestilence of fever passed; it did not touch them. War swept its red fire over the land; they felt nothing of it. They were forgotten; and they did not know it.

If sometimes an infinite weariness took possession of Judith, if sometimes this weak and querulous shadow of a man seemed something far off and alien, she remembered that even with that she had brought him to

his evil plight. And she knew, without formulating it, that she was better with him than without him ; she said to herself that, of two old trees grown side by side, if one be taken away, presently the other fails and falls.

One day the meagre interest money did not come. Judith had been defrauded by the agent. She had to draw from the sum in the savings bank. As long as that sum eked itself out she paid her tax. But there came a time when no tax had been paid for so long, that the officials visited the place. They saw a brown and withered woman at the chopping-log, an ashen, wizened man in the doorway, playing weakly a droning fiddle to no tune other than that the frogs piped in the marshes of the brook below. And at the end of a few questions they went away and let the taxes go. When—after her long absences grown indifferent to the public eye—Judith went down into the town with some baskets she had woven from osiers, hoping to sell them, she lost her way among new thoroughfares, new

buildings, new faces; the old town was gone.

But she did not realize that with the old town was gone also the full knowledge of her misdeed, that she herself had become little more than a tradition.

The living was scanty now — sometimes the broth of one of the chickens of their dwarfed breed or of some little wild creature taken in a snare, the garden-crop that Judith raised, the bread and porridge she made herself of grain beaten in a mortar or ground between two stones. All the money they had was that which the factor paid them for the grass, cheating them in price and measure. Life was simplified to the mere fact of keeping alive. Lean and haggard, wrecks of themselves, they looked at each other merely with the eyes of usage. There were periods in which Ellis did not speak a word; possibly there were no thoughts in his mind; possibly the thoughts were too cruel for words. One day he suddenly transfixed her with a glance in the pale eye that had lost its old shadow of long

black lashes, a glance that might have been struck from blue steel. "Do you know," he said sternly, "where Judith Dauntry is?"

She ran to him and threw her arms about him. Old, bleary, unlovely, the soul for love of which she had made the world dust in the balance was still hidden there. "Here I am! Here I am! Oh, Ellis, don't you know me?" she cried.

He loosened her hands. "You are taking a liberty," was what his manner said. But he made no sound.

At other times he knew who she was perfectly well, and submitted with a gentle patience to the ministrations that kept him scrupulously clean. Occasionally he walked out with her to the brook, leaning on his stick and on her arm with the old confidence. Sitting beside the lucid brown and white depths and sparkles, the murmur of the rippling flow would lull him into a half sleep of which the dreams may have been apparitions from the days of his youth. For he would start and say to her, "Was it

well done, Judith? Are you sorry now?" And she would press the thin and freckled hand to her sunken lips, and think how great and splendid were the fires of their youth to be such ashes now!

The flowing of the brook always so quieted the restlessness of Ellis that they had long been wont to stumble along together and rest there in pleasant weather, saying nothing, thinking nothing, lost in some inane dream. If Judith went over again and again the days that were no more, she gave no sign. If she spoke it was about the yarn she knit, the habits of the speckled hen, the rheumatism that bent and gnarled them both. She had ceased to think of herself as an abandoned woman; so far as she thought of it at all she had a dim sense of being virtuous.

They had been sitting there in silence a long time one afternoon, when he suddenly looked up startled and bewildered. "Some one said—who was it?" he exclaimed—"some one just told me that Ellis Goff was dead.—Poor fellow," he said, a few moments

afterward. It was like a great flash of revelation to Judith.

Ellis Goff was dead indeed not many days later. He stole away one morning as Judith was occupied inside the house, and hobbled along to the brook, and followed its winding up and up into the pass of the hills, and then stooped and drank from the palm of his old hand the drops that dashed into it. She found him half his length across the Stone of Sacrifice, half in the pool where he had bent to see the pebbles turned into live jewels again or had fallen face downward in the water. But there were no jewels flashing splendor from the clear depth when Judith found him. It was dark night. Only one star glinting there showed there was a heaven above.

When the old doctor came up, as he occasionally did, and led by some indistinct sound followed along the brook the next morning, he saw Judith sitting there, staring into Ellis's dead face as his head lay on her knee, now singing as a mother sings to her child, now cooing like a dove, now scream-

ing like an eagle. Old, comfortless, Judith Dauntry had gone mad.

They carried her away to the almshouse; and the town took the place for the taxes. And in time the glancing, dancing brook was set to turning wheels. But they never could keep the old woman long away — she tramping mile after mile to find it. The children knew the gaunt figure in the long cloak and hood as that of some tragic thing. To-day the savage in them threw stones at her; to-morrow they ran after her to hear the low voice muttering, "Except that the Lord had shortened those days, except that the Lord had shortened those days."

One night the merry boys made a bonfire of the old house. The flames wallowed up the sky, and the brook repeated them again to heaven. The later winter weather gave the ruins a glitter of huge icicles. When Judith toiled up the way at last and came upon the charred and shining heap she gave a great cry. "The wages of sin is death!" she cried. She went along mechanically, as though she would see if the brook had gone

with the dwelling. And presently she sat down upon the ice, bending her ear like one who would listen more plainly to the music of the tinkle underneath the icy mail. And there she fell asleep and became ice herself. And when the Poormaster came up, swearing under his breath, he found that Judith Dauntry had taken her wages.

Her Story



Her Story



WELLNIGH the worst of it all is the mystery.

If it were true, that accounts for my being here. If it were not true, then the best thing they could do with me was to bring me here. Then, too, if it were true, they would save themselves by hurrying me away ; and if it were not true — You see, just as all roads lead to Rome, all roads led me to this Retreat. If it were true, it was enough to craze me ; and if it were not true, I was already crazed. And there it is ! I can't make out, sometimes, whether I am really beside myself or not ; for it seems that whether I was crazed or sane, if it were true, they would naturally put me out of sight and hearing — bury me alive, as they have done, in this Retreat. They ? Well, no — he. She stayed

at home, I hear. If she had come with us, doubtless I should have found reason enough to say to the physician at once that she was the mad woman, not I — she, who, for the sake of her own brief pleasure, could make a whole after-life of misery for three of us. She — Oh no, don't rise, don't go. I am quite myself, I am perfectly calm. Mad! There was never a drop of crazy blood in the Ridgleys or the Bruces, or any of the generations behind them, and why should it suddenly break out like a smothered fire in me? That is one of the things that puzzle me — why should it come to light all at once in me if it were not true?

Now, I am not going to be incoherent. It was too kind in you to be at such trouble to come and see me in this prison, this grave. I will not cry out once: I will just tell you the story of it all exactly as it was, and you shall judge. If I can, that is — oh, if I can! For sometimes, when I think of it, it seems as if Heaven itself would fail to take my part if I did not lift my own voice. And I cry, and I tear my hair and my flesh, till I

know my anguish weighs down their joy, and the little scale that holds that joy flies up under the scorching of the sun, and God sees the festering thing for what it is! Ah, it is not injured reason that cries out in that way: it is a breaking heart!

How cool your hand is, how pleasant your face is, how good it is to see you! Don't be afraid of me: I am as much myself, I tell you, as you are. What an absurdity! Certainly any one who heard me make such a speech would think I was insane and without benefit of clergy. To ask you not to be afraid of me because I am myself. Isn't it what they call a vicious circle? And then to cap the climax by adding that I am as much myself as you are myself! But no matter — you know better. Did you say it was ten years? Yes, I knew it was as much as that — oh, it seems a hundred years! But we hardly show it: your hair is still the same as when we were at school; and mine — Look at this lock — I cannot understand why it is only sprinkled here and there: it ought to be white as the

driven snow. My babies are almost grown women, Elizabeth. How could he do without me all this time? Hush now! I am not going to be disturbed at all; only that color of your hair puts me so in mind of his: perhaps there was just one trifle more of gold in his. Do you remember that lock that used to fall over his forehead and which he always tossed back so impatiently. I used to think that the golden Apollo of Rhodes had just such massive, splendid locks of hair as that; but I never told him; I never had the face to praise him; she had. She could exclaim how like ivory the forehead was — that great wide forehead — how that keen aquiline was to be found in the portrait of the Spencer of two hundred years ago. She could tell of the proud lip, of the fire burning in the hazel eye. She knew how, by a silent flattery, as she shrank away and looked up at him, to admire his haughty stature, and make him feel the strength and glory of his manhood and the delicacy of her womanhood.

She was a little thing — a little thing, but

wondrous fair. Fair, did I say? No: she was dark as an Egyptian, but such perfect features, such rich and splendid color, such great soft eyes — so soft, so black — so superb a smile; and then such hair! When she let it down, the backward curling ends lay on the ground and she stood on them, or the children lifted them and carried them behind her as pages carry a queen's train. If I had my two hands twisted in that hair! Oh, how I hate that hair! It would make as good a bowstring as ever any Carthaginian woman's made.

Ah, that is atrocious! I am sure you think so. But living all these lonesome years as I have done seems to double back one's sinfulness upon one's self. Because one is sane it does not follow that one is a saint. And when I think of my innocent babies playing with the hair that once I saw him lift and pass across his lips! But I will not think of it!

Well, well! I was a pleasant thing to look at myself once on a time, you know, Elizabeth. He used to tell me so: those

were his very words. I was tall and slender, and if my skin was pale it was clear with a pearly clearness, and the lashes of my gray eyes were black as shadows; but now those eyes are only the color of tears.

I never told a syllable about it—I never could. It was so deep down in my heart, that love I had for him: it slept there so dark and still and full, for he was all I had in the world. I was alone, an orphan—if not friendless, yet quite dependent. I see you remember it all. I did not even sit in the pew with my cousin's family,—there were so many to fill it,—but down in one beneath the gallery, you know. And altogether life was a thing to me that hardly seemed worth the living. I went to church one Sunday, I recollect, idly and dreamingly as usual. I did not look off my book till a voice filled my ear—a strange new voice, a deep sweet voice, that invited you and yet commanded you—a voice whose sound divided the core of my heart, and sent thrills that were half joy, half pain, coursing through me. And then I looked up and saw him at

the desk. He was reading the first lesson: "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name: thou art mine." And I saw the bright hair, the bright upturned face, the white surplice, and I said to myself, It is a vision, it is an angel; and I cast down my eyes. But the voice went on, and when I looked again he was still there. Then I bethought me that it must be the one who was coming to take the place of our superannuated rector — the last of a fine line, they had been saying the day before, who, instead of finding his pleasure otherwise, had taken all his wealth and prestige into the Church.

Why will a trifle melt you so — a strain of music, a color in the sky, a perfume? Have you never leaned from the window at evening, and had the scent of a flower float by and fill you with as keen a sorrow as if it had been disaster touching you? Long ago, I mean — we never lean from any windows here. I don't know how, but it was in that same invisible way that this voice melted me; and when I heard it say-

ing, "Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert," I was fairly crying. Oh, nervous tears, I dare say. The doctor here would tell you so, at any rate. And that is what I complain of here: they give a physiological reason for every emotion—they could give you a chemical formula for your very soul, I have no doubt. Well, perhaps they were nervous tears, for certainly there was nothing to cry for, and the mood went as suddenly as it came—changed to a sort of exaltation, I suppose—and when they sang the psalm, and he had swept in, in his black gown, and had mounted the pulpit stairs, and was resting that fair head on the big Bible in his silent prayer, I too was singing—singing like one possessed:

"Then, to thy courts when I repair,
My soul shall rise on joyful wing,
The wonders of thy love declare,
And join the strain which angels sing."

And as he rose I saw him searching for the

voice unconsciously, and our eyes met. Oh, it was a fresh young voice, let it be mine or whose. I can hear it now as if it were someone else singing. Ah, ah, it has been silent so many years! Does it make you smile to hear me pity myself? It is not myself I am pitying: it is that fresh young girl that loved so. But it used to rejoice me to think that I loved him before I laid eyes on him.

He came to my cousin's in the week — not to see Sylvia or to see Laura: he talked of church-music with my cousin, and then crossed the room and sat down by me. I remember how I grew cold and trembled — how glad, how shy I was; and then he had me sing; and at first Sylvia sang with us, but by and by we sang alone — I sang alone. He brought me yellow old church music, written in quaint characters: he said those characters, those old square breves, were a text guarding secrets of enchantment as much as the text of Merlin's book did; and so we used to find it. Once he brought a copy of an old Roman hymn, written only

in the Roman letters : he said it was a hymn which the ancients sang to Maia, the mother-earth, and which the Church fathers adopted, singing it stealthily in the hidden places of the Catacombs ; and together we translated it into tones. A rude but majestic thing it was.

And once — The sunshine was falling all about us in the bright lonely room, and the shadows of the rose leaves at the window were dancing over us. I had been singing a Gloria while he walked up and down the room, and he came up behind me : he stooped and kissed me on the mouth. And after that there was no more singing, for, lovely as the singing was, the love was lovelier yet. Why do I complain of such a hell as this is now ? I had my heaven once — oh, I had my heaven once ! And as for the other, perhaps I deserve it all, for I saw God only through him : it was he that waked me to worship. I had no faith but Spencer's faith ; if he had been a heathen, I should have been the same, and creeds and systems might have perished for

me had he only been spared from the wreck. And he had loved me from the first moment that his eyes met mine. "When I looked at you," he said, "singing that simple hymn that first day, I felt as I do when I look at the evening star leaning out of the clear sunset lustre: there is something in your face as pure, as remote, as shining. It will always be there," he said, "though you should live a hundred years." He little knew, he little knew!

But he loved me then — oh yes, I never doubted that. There were no happier lovers trod the earth. We took our pleasure as lovers do: we walked in the fields; we sat on the river's side; together we visited the poor and sick; he read me the passages he liked best in his writing from week to week; he brought me the verse from which he meant to preach, and up in the organ-loft I improvised to him the thoughts that it inspired in me. I did that timidly indeed: I could not think my thoughts were worth his hearing till I forgot myself, and only thought of him and the

glory I would have revealed to him, and then the great clustering chords and the full music of the diapason swept out beneath my hands — swept along the aisles and swelled up the raftered roof as if they would find the stars, and sunset and twilight stole around us there as we sat still in the succeeding silence. I was happy : I was humble too. I wondered why I had been chosen for such a blest and sacred lot. It was so blessed to be allowed to minister one delight to him. I had a little print of the angel of the Lord appearing to Mary with the lily of annunciation in his hand, and I thought — I dare not tell you what I thought. I made an idol of my piece of clay.

When the leaves had turned we were married, and he took me home. Ah, what a happy home it was ! Luxury and beauty filled it. When I first went into it and left the chill October night without, fires blazed upon the hearths ; flowers bloomed in every room ; a marble Eros held a light up, searching for his Psyche. “ *Our* love has

found its soul," said he. He led me to the music-room—a temple in itself, for its rounded ceiling towered to the height of the house. There were golden organ-pipes and banks of keys fit for St. Cecilia's use; there were all the delightful outlines of violin and piccolo and harp and horn for any who would use them; there was a pianoforte near the door for me—one such as I had never touched before; and there were cases on all sides filled with the rarest musical works. The floor was bare and inlaid; the windows were latticed in stained glass, so that no common light of day ever filtered through, but light bluer than the sky, gold as the dawn, purple as the night; and then there were vast embowering chairs, in any of which he could hide himself away while I made my incantation, as he sometimes called it, of the great spirits of song. As I tried the piano that night he tuned the old Amati which he himself now and then played upon, and together we improvised our own epithalamium. It was the violin that took the strong assuring part with

strains of piercing sweetness, and the music of the piano flowed along in a soft cantabile of undersong. It seemed to me as if his part was like the flight of some white and strong-winged bird above a sunny brook.

But he had hardly created this place for the love of me alone. He adored music as a regenerator; he meant to use it so among his people: here were to be pursued those labors which should work miracles when produced in the open church. For he was building a church with the half of his fortune — a church full of restoration of the old and creation of the new: the walls within were to be a frosty tracery of vines running to break into the gigantic passion-flower that formed the rose-window; the lectern a golden globe upon a tripod, clasped by a silver dove holding on outstretched wings the book.

I have feared; since I have been here, that Spencer's piety was less piety than partisanship: I have doubted if faith were so much alive in him as the love of a great perfect system, and the pride in it I know

he always felt. But I never thought about it then: I believed in him as I would have believed in an apostle. So stone by stone the church went up, and stone by stone our lives followed it—lives of such peace, such bliss! Then fresh hopes came into it—sweet trembling hopes; and by and by our first child was born. And if I had been happy before, what was I then? There are some compensations in this world: such happiness could not come twice, such happiness as there was in that moment when I lay, painless and at peace, with the little cheek nestled beside my own, while he bent above us both, proud and glad and tender. It was a dear little baby—so fair, so bright! and when she could walk she could sing. Her sister sang earlier yet; and what music their two shrill sweet voices made as they sat in their little chairs together at twilight before the fire, their curls glistening and their red shoes glistening, while they sang the evening hymn, Spencer on one side of the hearth and I upon the other! Sometimes we let the dear things sit up for a later

hour in the music-room — for many a canticle we tried and practised there that hushed hearts and awed them when the choir gave them on succeeding Sundays — and always afterward I heard them singing in their sleep, just as a bird stirs in his nest and sings his stave in the night. Oh, we were happy then ; and it was then she came.

She was the step-child of his uncle, and had a small fortune of her own, and Spencer had been left her guardian ; and so she was to live with us — at any rate, for a while. I dreaded her coming. I did not want the intrusion ; I did not like the things I heard about her ; I knew she would be a discord in our harmony. But Spencer, who had only seen her once in her childhood, had been told by some one who travelled in Europe with her that she was delightful and had a rare intelligence. She was one of those women often delightful to men indeed, but whom other women — by virtue of their own kindred instincts, it may be, perhaps by virtue of temptations overcome — see through and know for what they are. But

she had her own way of charming: she was the being of infinite variety — to-day glad, to-morrow sad, freakish, and always exciting you by curiosity as to her next caprice, and so moody that after a season of the lowering weather of one of her dull humors you were ready to sacrifice something for the sake of the sunshine that she knew how to make so vivid and so sweet. Then, too, she brought forward her forces by detachment. At first she was the soul of domestic life, sitting at night beneath the light and embossing on weblike muslin designs of flower and leaf which she had learned in her convent, listening to Spencer as he read, and taking from the little wallet of her work-basket apropos scraps which she had preserved from the sermon of some Italian father of the Church or of some French divine. As for me, the only thing I knew was my poor music; and I used to burn with indignation when she interposed that unknown tongue between my husband and myself. Presently her horses came, and then, graceful in her dark riding-habit, she would spend a

morning fearlessly subduing one of the fiery fellows, and dash away at last with plume and veil streaming behind her. In the early evening she would dance with the children — witch-dances they were — with her round arms linked above her head, and her feet weaving the measure in and out as deftly as any flashing-footed Bayadere might do — only when Spencer was there to see: at other times I saw she pushed the little hindering things aside without a glance.

By and by she began to display a strange dramatic sort of power: she would rehearse to Spencer scenes that she had met with from day to day in the place, giving now the old churchwarden's voice and now the sexton's, their gestures and very faces; she could tell the ailments of half the old women in the parish who came to me with them, and in their own tone and manner to the life; she told us once of a street-scene, with the crier crying a lost child, the mother following with lamentations, the passing strangers questioning, the boys hooting, and the child's reappearance, fol-

lowed by a tumult, with kisses and blows and cries, so that I thought I saw it all; and presently she had found the secret and vulnerable spot of every friend we had, and could personate them all as vividly as if she did it by necromancy.

One night she began to sketch our portraits in charcoal: the likenesses were not perfect; she exaggerated the careless elegance of Spencer's attitude; perhaps the primness of my own. But yet he saw there the ungraceful trait for the first time, I think. And so much led to more: she brought out her portfolios, and there were her pencil-sketches from the Rhine and from the Guadalquivir, rich water-colors of Venetian scenes, interiors of old churches, and sheet after sheet covered with details of church architecture. Spencer had been admiring all the others—in spite of something that I thought I saw in them, a something that was not true, a trait of her own identity, for I had come to criticise her sharply—but when his eye rested on those sheets I saw it sparkle, and he caught them up and pored over them one by one.

“I see you have mastered the whole thing,” he said: “you must instruct me here.” And so she did. And there were hours, while I was busied with servants and accounts or with the children, when she was closeted with Spencer in the study, criticising, comparing, making drawings, hunting up authorities; other hours when they walked away together to the site of the new church that was building, and here an arch was destroyed, and there an aisle was extended, and here a row of cloisters sketched into the plan, and there a row of windows, till the whole design was reversed and made over. And they had the thing between them, for, admire and sympathize as I might, I did not know. At first Spencer would repeat the day’s achievement to me, but the contempt for my ignorance which she did not deign to hide soon put an end to it when she was present.

It was this interest that now unveiled a new phase of her character: she was devout. She had a little altar in her room; she knew all about albs and chasubles; she would

have persuaded Spencer to burn candles in the chancel ; she talked of a hundred mysteries and symbols ; she wanted to embroider a stole to lay across his shoulders. She was full of small church sentimentalities, and as one after another she uttered them, it seemed to me that her belief was no sound fruit of any system — if it were belief, and not a mere bunch of fancies — but only, as you might say, a rotten windfall of the Romish Church : it had none of the round splendor of that Church's creed, none of the pure simplicity of ours : it would be no stay in trouble, no shield in temptation. I said as much to Spencer.

“ You are prejudiced,” said he : “ her belief is the result of long observation abroad, I think. She has found the need of outward observances : they are, she has told me, a shrine to the body of her faith, like that commanded in the building of the tabernacle, where the ark of the covenant was enclosed in the holy of holies.”

“ And you didn't think it profane in her to speak so ? But I don't believe it, Spen-

cer," I said. "She has no faith: she has some sentimentalisms."

"You are prejudiced," he repeated. "She seems to me a wonderful and gifted being."

"Too gifted," I said. "Her very gifts are unnatural in their abundance. There must be scrofula there to keep such a fire in the blood and sting the brain to such action: she will die in a madhouse, depend upon it." Think of my saying such a thing as that!

"I have never heard you speak so before," he replied coldly. "I hope you do not envy her her powers."

"I envy her nothing," I cried. "For she is as false as she is beautiful!" But I did — oh I did!

"Beautiful?" said Spencer. "Is she beautiful? I never thought of that."

"You are very blind, then," I said with a glad smile.

Spencer smiled too. "It is not the kind of beauty I admire," said he.

"Then I must teach you, sir," said she.

And we both started to see her in the doorway, and I, for one, did not know, till shortly before I found myself here, how much or how little she had learned of what we said.

"Then I must teach you, sir," said she again. And she came deliberately into the firelight and paused upon the rug, drew out the silver arrows and shook down all her hair about her, till the great snake-like coils unrolled upon the floor.

"Hyacinthine," said Spencer.

"Indeed it is," said she. "The very color of the jacinth, with that red tint in its darkness that they call black in the shade and gold in the sun. Now look at me."

"Shut your eyes, Spencer," I cried, and laughed.

But he did not shut his eyes. The firelight flashed over her: the color in her cheeks and on her lips sprang ripe and red in it as she held the hair away from them with her rosy finger-tips; her throat curved small and cream-white from the bosom that the lace of her dinner-dress scarcely hid;

and the dark eyes glowed with a great light as they lay full on his.

“You mustn’t call it vanity,” said she. “It is only that it is impossible, looking at the picture in the glass, not to see it as I see any other picture. But for all that, I know it is not every fool’s beauty: it is no daub for the vulgar gaze, but a masterpiece that it needs the educated eye to find. I could tell you how this nostril is like that in a famous marble, how the curve of this cheek is that of a certain Venus, the line of this forehead like the line in the dreamy Antinous’ forehead. Are you taught? Is it —?”

Then she twisted her hair again and fastened the arrows, and laughed and turned away to look over the evening paper. But as for Spencer, as he lay back in his lordly way, surveying the vision from crown to toe, I saw him flush—I saw him flush and start and quiver, and then he closed his eyes and pressed his fingers on them, and lay back again and said not a word.

She began to read aloud something concerning services at the recent dedication of

a church. I was called out as she read. When I came back, a half hour afterward, they were talking. I stopped at my work-table in the next room for a skein of floss that she had asked me for, and I heard her saying, "You cannot expect me to treat you with reverence. You are a married priest, and you know what opinion I necessarily must have of married priests." Then I came in and she was silent.

But I knew, I always knew, that if Spencer had not felt himself weak, had not found himself stirred, if he had not recognized that, when he flushed and quivered before her charm, it was the flesh and not the spirit that tempted him, he would not have listened to her subtle invitation to austerity. As it was, he did. He did—partly in shame, partly in punishment; but to my mind the listening was confession. She had set the wedge that was to sever our union—the little seed in a mere idle cleft that grows and grows and splits the rock asunder.

Well, I had my duties, you know. I never felt my husband's wealth a reason why

I should neglect them any more than another wife should neglect her duties. I was wanted in the parish, sent for here and waited for there: the dying liked to see me comfort their living, the living liked to see me touch their dead; some wanted help, and others wanted consolation; and where I felt myself too young and unlearned to give advice, I could at least give sympathy. Perhaps I was the more called upon for such detail of duty because Spencer was busy with the greater things, the church-building and the sermons — sermons that once on a time lifted you and held you on their strong wings. But of late Spencer had been preaching old sermons. He had been moody and morose too: sometimes he seemed oppressed with melancholy. He had spoken to me strangely, had looked at me as if he pitied me, had kept away from me. But she had not regarded his moods: she had followed him in his solitary strolls, had sought him in his study; and she had ever a mystery or symbol to be interpreted, the picture of a private chapel that she had heard of when

abroad, or the ground-plan of an ancient one, or some new temptation to his ambition, as I divine. And soon he was himself again.

I was wrong to leave him so to her, but what was there else for me to do? And as for those duties of mine, as I followed them I grew restive; I abridged them, I hastened home. I was impatient even with the detentions the children caused. I could not leave them to their nurses, for all that; but they kept me away from him, and he was alone with her.

One day at last he told me that his mind was troubled by the suspicion that his marriage was a mistake; that on his part at least it had been wrong; that he had been thinking a priest should have the Church only for his bride, and should wait at the altar mortified in every affection; that it was not for hands that were full of caresses and lips that were covered with kisses to touch the sacrament, to offer praise. But for answer I brought my children and put them in his arms. I was white and cold and shaking, but I asked him if they were not justifica-

tion enough. And I told him that he did his duty better abroad for the heartening of a wife at home, and that he knew better how to interpret God's love to men through his own love for his children. And I laid my head on his breast beside them, and he clasped us all and we cried together, he and I.

But that was not enough, I found. And when our good bishop came, who had always been like a father to Spencer, I led the conversation to that point one evening, and he discovered Spencer's trouble, and took him away and reasoned with him. The bishop was a power with Spencer, and I think that was the end of it.

The end of that, but only the beginning of the rest. For she had accustomed him to the idea of separation from me — the idea of doing without me. He had put me away from himself once in his mind: we had been one soul, and now we were two.

One day, as I stood in my sleeping-room with the door ajar, she came in. She had never been there before, and I cannot tell

you how insolently she looked about her. There was a bunch of flowers on a stand that Spencer himself placed there for me every morning. He had always done so, and there had been no reason for breaking off the habit; and I had always worn one of them at my throat. She advanced a hand to pull out a blossom. "Do not touch them," I cried: "my husband puts them there."

"Suppose he does," said she lightly. "For how long?" Then she overlooked me with a long sweeping glance of search and contempt, shrugged her shoulders, and with a French sentence that I did not understand turned back and coolly broke off the blossom she had marked and hung it in her hair. I could not take her by the shoulders and put her from the room. I could not touch the flowers that she had desecrated. I left the room myself, and left her in it, and went down to dinner for the first time without the flower at my throat. I saw Spencer's eye note the omission: perhaps he took it as a release from me, for he never put the flowers in my room again after that day.

Nor did he ask me any more into his study, as he had been used, or read his sermons to me. There was no need of his talking over the church-building with me — he had her to talk it over with. And as for our music, that had been a rare thing since she arrived, for her conversation had been such as to leave but little time for it, and somehow when she came into the music-room and began to dictate to me the time in which I should take an *Inflammatus* and the spirit in which I should sing a ballad, I could not bear it. Then, too, to tell you the truth, my voice was hoarse and choked with tears full half the time.

It was some weeks after the flowers ceased that our youngest child fell ill. She was very ill — I don't think Spencer knew how ill. I dared not trust her with any one, and Spencer said no one could take such care of her as her mother could; so, although we had nurses in plenty, I hardly left the room by night or day. I heard their voices down below, I saw them go out for their walks. It was a hard fight, but I saved her.

But I was worn to a shadow when all was done — worn with anxiety for her, with alternate fevers of hope and fear, with the weight of my responsibility as to her life; and with anxiety for Spencer too, with a despairing sense that the end of peace had come, and with the total sleeplessness of many nights. Now, when the child was mending and gaining every day, I could not sleep if I would.

The doctor gave me anodynes, but to no purpose: they only nerved me wide awake. My eyes ached, and my brain ached, and my body ached, but it was of no use: I could not sleep. I counted the spots on the wall, the motes upon my eyes, the notes of all the sheets of music I could recall. I remembered the Eastern punishment of keeping the condemned awake till they die, and wondered what my crime was; I thought if I could but sleep I might forget my trouble, or take it up freshly and master it. But no, it was always there — a heavy cloud, a horror of foreboding. As I heard that woman's step go by the door I longed to rid the

house of it, and I dented my palms with my nails till she had passed.

I did not know what to do. It seemed to me that I was wicked in letting the thing go on, in suffering Spencer to be any longer exposed to her power; but then I feared to take a step lest I should thereby rivet the chains she was casting on him. And then I longed so for one hour of the old dear happiness — the days when I and the children had been all and enough. I did not know what to do; I had no one to counsel with; I was wild within myself, and all distraught. Once I thought if I could not rid the house of her I could rid it of myself; and as I went through a dark passage and chanced to look up where a bright-headed nail glittered, I questioned if it would bear my weight. For days the idea haunted me. I fancied that when I was gone perhaps he would love me again, and at any rate I might be asleep and at rest. But the thought of the children prevented me, and one other thought — I was not certain that even my sorrows would excuse me before God.

I went down to dinner again at last. How she glowed and abounded in her beauty as she sat there! And I—I must have been very thin and ghastly: perhaps I looked a little wild in all my bewilderment and hurt. His heart smote him, it may be, for he came round to where I sat by the fire afterward and smoothed my hair and kissed my forehead. He could not tell all I was suffering then—all I was struggling with; for I thought I had better put him out of the world than let him, who was once so pure and good, stay in it to sin. I could have done it, you know. For though I still lay with the little girl, I could have stolen back into our own room with the chloroform, and he would never have known. I turned the handle of the door one night, but the bolt was slipped. I never thought of killing her, you see: let her live and sin, if she would. She was the thing of slime and sin, a splendid tropical growth of the passionate heat and the slime: it was only her nature. But then we think it no harm to kill reptiles, however splendid.

But it was by that time that the voices had begun to talk with me — all night long, all day. It was they, I found, that had kept me so sleepless. Go where I might, they were ever before me. If I went to the woods, I heard them in the whisper of every pine tree. If I went down to the seashore, I heard them in the splash of every wave. I heard them in the wind, in the singing of my ears, in the children's breath as I hung above them,—for I had decided that if I went out of the world I would take the children with me. If I sat down to play, the things would twist the chords into discords; if I sat down to read, they would come between me and the page.

Then I could see the creatures: they had wings like bats. I did not dare speak of them, although I fancied she suspected me, for once she said, as I was kissing my little girl, "When you are gone to a madhouse, don't think they'll have many such kisses." Did she say it? or did I think she said it? I did not answer her, I did not look up: I suppose I should have flown at her throat if I had.

I took the children out with me on my rambles : we went for miles ; sometimes I carried one, sometimes the other. I took such long, long walks to escape those noisome things : they would never leave me till I was quite tired out. Now and then I was gone the whole day ; and all the time that I was gone he was with her, I knew, and she was tricking out her beauty and practising her arts.

I went to a little festival with them, for Spencer insisted. And she made shadow-pictures on the wall, wonderful things with her perfect profile and her perfect arms and her subtle curves—she out of sight, the shadow only seen. Now it was Isis, I remember, and now it was the head and shoulders and trailing hair of a floating sea-nymph. And then there were charades in which she played ; and I can't tell you the glorious thing she looked when she came on as Helen of Troy with all her "beauty shadowed in white veils," you know—that brown and red beauty with its smiles and radiance under the wavering of

the flower-wrought veil. I sat by Spencer, and I felt him shiver. He was fighting and struggling too within himself, very likely; only he knew that he was going to yield after all — only he longed to yield while he feared. But as for me, I saw one of those bat-like things perched on her ear as she stood before us, and when she opened her mouth to speak I saw them flying in and out. And I said to Spencer, "She is tormenting me. I cannot stay and see her swallowing the souls of men in this way." And I would have gone, but he held me down fast in my seat. But if I was crazy then — as they say I was, I suppose — it was only with a metaphor, for she was sucking Spencer's soul out of his body.

But I was not crazy. I should admit I might have been if I alone had seen those evil spirits. But Spencer saw them too. He never told me so, but — there are subtle ways — I knew he did; for when I opened the church door late, as I often did at that time after my long walks, they would rush in past me with a whizz, and as I sat in the

pew I would see him steadily avoid looking at me ; and if he looked by any chance, he would turn so pale that I have thought he would drop where he stood ; and he would redden afterward as though one had struck him. He knew then what I endured with them ; but I was not the one to speak of it. Don't tell me that his color changed and he shuddered so because I sat there mumbling and nodding to myself. It was because he saw those things mopping and mowing beside me and whispering in my ear. Oh what loathsomeness the obscene creatures whispered ! Foul quips and evil words I had never heard before, ribald songs and oaths ; and I would clap my hands over my mouth to keep from crying out at them. Creatures of the imagination, you may say. It is possible. But they were so vivid that they seem real to me even now. I burn and tingle as I recall them. And how could I have imagined such sounds, such shapes, of things I had never heard or seen or dreamed ?

And Spencer was very unhappy, I am

sure. I was the mother of his children, and if he loved me no more, he had an old kindness for me still, and my distress distressed him. But for all that the glamour was on him, and he could not give up that woman and her beauty and her charm. Once or twice he may have thought about sending her away, but perhaps he could not bring himself to do it — perhaps he reflected it was too late, and now it was no matter. But every day she stayed he was the more like wax in her hands. Oh, he was weaker than water that is poured out. He was abandoning himself, and forgetting earth and heaven and hell itself, before a passion — a passion that soon would cloy, and then would sting.

It was the spring season: I had been out several hours. The sunset fell while I was in the wood, and the stars came out; and at one time I thought I would lie down there on last year's leaves and never get up again. But I remembered the children, and went home to them. They were in bed and asleep when I took off my shoes and opened the door of their room —

breathing so sweetly and evenly, the little yellow heads close together on one pillow, their hands tossed about the coverlid, their parted lips, their rosy cheeks. I knelt to feel the warm breath on my own cold cheek, and then the voices began whispering again: "If only they never waked! they never waked!"

And all I could do was to spring to my feet and run from the room. I ran shoeless down the great staircase and through the long hall. I thought I would go to Spencer and tell him all—all my sorrows, all the suggestions of the voices, and maybe in the endeavor to save me he would save himself. And I ran down the long dimly-lighted drawing-room, led by the sound I heard, to the music-room, whose doors were open just beyond. It was lighted only by the pale glimmer from the other room and by the moonlight through the painted panes. And I paused to listen to what I had never listened to there—the sound of the harp and a voice with it. Of course they had not heard me coming, and I hesitated and

looked, and then I glided within the door and stood just by the open piano there.

She sat at the harp singing—the huge gilded harp. I did not know she sang—she had kept that for her last reserve—but she struck the harp so that it sang itself, like some great prisoned soul, and her voice followed it—oh so rich a voice! My own was white and thin, I felt, beside it. But mine had soared, and hers still clung to earth—a contralto sweet with honeyed sweetness—the sweetness of unstrained honey that has the earth-taste and the heavy blossom-dust yet in it—sweet, though it grew hoarse and trembling with passion. He sat in one of the great arm-chairs just before her: he was white with feeling, with rapture, with forgetfulness; his eyes shone like stars. He moved restlessly, a strange smile kindled all his face: he bent toward her, and the music broke off in the middle as they threw their arms around each other, and hung there lip to lip and heart to heart. And suddenly I crashed down both my hands on the keyboard before me, and stood and glared upon them.

And I never knew anything more till I woke up here.

And that is the whole of it. That is the puzzle of it — was it a horrid nightmare, an insane vision, or was it true? Was it true that I saw Spencer, my white, clean lover, my husband, a man of God, the father of our spotless babies,—was it true that I saw him so, or was it only some wild, vile conjuration of disease? Oh, I would be willing to have been crazed a lifetime, a whole lifetime, only to wake one moment before I died and find that that had never been!

Well, well, well! When time passed and I became more quiet, I told the doctor here about the voices—I never told him of Spencer or of her—and he bade me dismiss care. He said I was ill—excitement and sleeplessness had surcharged my nerves with that strange magnetic fluid that has worked so much mischief in the world. There was no organic disease, you see; only when my nerves were rested and right, my brain would be right. And the doctor gave me medicines and books and work, and

when I saw the bat-like things again I was to go instantly to him. And after a little while I was not sure that I did see them. And in a little while longer they had ceased to come altogether. And I have had no more of them. I was on my parole then in the parlor, at the table, in the grounds. I felt that I was cured of whatever had ailed me: I could escape at any moment that I wished.

And it came Christmas time. A terrible longing for home overcame me—for my children. I thought of them at this time when I had been used to take such pains for their pleasure. I thought of the little empty stockings, the sad faces; I fancied I could hear them crying for me. I forgot all about my word of honor. It seemed to me that I should die, that I might as well die, if I could not see my little darlings, and hold them on my knees, and sing to them while the chimes were ringing in the Christmas Eve. And winter was here and there was so much to do for them. And I walked down the garden, and looked out at the gate, and

opened it and went through. And I slept that night in a barn — so free, so free and glad ! And the next day an old farmer and his sons, who thought they did me a service, brought me back, and of course I shrieked and raved. And so would you.

But since then I have been in this ward and a prisoner. I have my work, my amusement. I send such little things as I can make to my girls. I read. Sometimes of late I sing in the Sunday service. The place is a sightly place ; the grounds, when we are taken out, are fine ; the halls are spacious and pleasant.

Pleasant — but ah, when you have trodden them ten years !

And so, you see, if I were a clod, if I had no memory, no desires, if I had never been happy before, I might be happy now. I am confident the doctor thinks me well. But he has no orders to let me go. Sometimes it is so wearisome. And it might be worse if lately I had not been allowed a new service. And that is to try to make a woman smile who came here a year ago. She is a little

woman, swarthy as a Malay, but her hair, that grows as rapidly as a fungus grows in the night, is whiter than leprosy: her eyebrows are so long and white that they veil and blanch her dark dim eyes; and she has no front teeth. A stone from a falling spire struck her from her horse, they say. The blow battered her and beat out reason and beauty. Her mind is dead: she remembers nothing, knows nothing; but she follows me about like a dog: she seems to want to do something for me, to propitiate me. All she ever says is to beg me to do her no harm. She will not go to sleep without my hand in hers. Sometimes, after long effort, I think there is a gleam of intelligence, but the doctor says there was once too much intelligence, and her case is hopeless.

Hopeless, poor thing! — that is an awful word: I could not wish it said for my worst enemy.

In spite of these ten years I cannot feel that it has yet been said for me.

If I am strange just now, it is only the

excitement of seeing you, only the habit of the strange sights and sounds here. I should be calm and well enough at home. I sit and picture to myself that some time Spencer will come for me — will take me to my girls, my fireside, my music. I shall hear his voice, I shall rest in his arms, I shall be blest again. For, oh, Elizabeth, I do forgive him all !

Or if he will not dare to trust himself at first, I picture to myself how he will send another — some old friend who knew me before my trouble — who will see me and judge, and carry back report that I am all I used to be — some friend who will open the gates of heaven to me, or close the gates of hell upon me — who will hold my life and my fate.

If — oh if it should be you, Elizabeth !

A Lost Identity

A Lost Identity



WHEN two seedlings, planted side by side, watered by the same shower, warmed by the same sun, shaken by the same breezes, have grown so close together that their roots make one tangle and their stems one fibre, how is it possible to separate them and leave them any life at all? Separated, can they be more than dead wood to be used for the purpose of others, with no vitality or joy of their own further than the log has that burns upon the hearth? I thought of that once in looking on the union of Leonard and Helena. Never have I seen two people so sufficient to themselves through all the changes of the planet. Separated, would either of them live other than as a soulless shadow? They thought not; looking at their happiness as if it were a

thing held in their hands; unashamed of their love, and speaking of it freely in any passionate moment.

“I think,” she had once said, “that if we were cast away upon a desert island, with just a book or two, we should be so happy as to ask for nothing more.”

“I have often thought of it,” he answered her. “How much at one we are! Do you know there are some substances that for a long time seem to be simple, one element only, strong, potent for good; but find at last and mix with such a substance its powerful attacking acid, and it resolves into two principles, each faint, powerless, good neither for itself nor for anything else. If death should be that powerful attacking force for us, resolving us into something other than the one we are —”

“Death cannot do it!” she cried triumphantly.

“No,” he said. “Life cannot do it. Not even death can do it. We shall be one to the grave, in it and beyond it!”

They could hardly remember a time when

they had not been a part of each other, in childhood or youth or maturity. Although there was a difference of two or three years in their ages, no pleasure was complete for Helena unless Leonard shared it, and the sorrow of one was the sorrow of both. When not yet strong enough to climb they used to kiss each other through the wickets. Later they played together in the orchard grass and fell asleep in one another's arms beneath the old plum trees there. Helena was five years old — a little gypsy like creature, with her great black eyes and rich color, and the fine flowing threads of her thick black hair about her face — and Leonard, fair and comely as a child of light, when they set out to walk to the end of the world together, hand in hand along the dusky highway in the sun, till the end seemed as far off as the beginning.

They were children of much promise; and Helena's ambitions did not suffer her to remain far behind Leonard in their studies. When he went away to school, she felt as if some integral portion of herself had

been severed from the rest, and she forgot her loneliness only by burying herself in her books. When he came home he told her how bitter were those first days without her. Perhaps the next half-term was not so hard to him. It was just as hard to Helena, alone with her books, without the stimulus of contact with a class, but content with only his own emulation and approbation. She would lose herself in the delights of her geometrical demonstration, which had a sort of poetry in it to her mind, in the marvels of her astronomy or chemistry, but in the remaining moments she only seemed to live till Leonard should come home again. She went, with others, to his examination when school was ending. She knew the theorem almost as well as he, could read the Virgilian line as well; but how swiftly and simply and easily he made the one plain, how gracefully and lightly he rendered the other! And when he recited the ballad of Naseby, with a white face, and a fire kindling in those luminous gray eyes, her heart thrilled and her blood ran cold, although in studying by herself she

had hated all the Puritan rant. That was sad to her—that she and Leonard should not think alike in all things: but they did not. She formed her feminine conclusions alone, and he had subtle and accomplished masters, and a further reach and fuller grasp of mind. He had a great mind, she thought to herself; he would do a great work in the world, whether he went into politics and helped “recast the nations old into another mould,” whether he sat down with a philosophical thesis and taught people how to think, or whether he took his medical degree and concerned himself with the origin of matter. And then, at last, Leonard was in college, coming home and inseparable from her in his long vacations, but beginning to have a thousand thoughts that were not her thoughts.

“How strange it is,” she said to him one day, after an historical discussion, “that we who used to have one thought are growing so apart?”

“We shall never grow apart, even if one of us thinks white black and the other thinks

it blue," he responded. "Those are surface things ; they do not change our natures and ourselves. But for all your hatred of the enemies of church and king, you are a Puritan of the Puritans yourself, my lady," he said, with his jesting voice. And he laughed as he said it, twisting the long, loose tress of darkness that had fallen on his shoulder as they leaned over the same book. What odds were any of her fancies? She was still the same sweet Helena.

"How can you say such a thing?"

"Because it is true. You reproach me for loving the Naseby ballad — you, who have inherited from two hundred years of Puritan ancestry their cast of mind, their austerity of conviction, their — I suppose if you knew I won't fifty dollars at cards the night before I came home —"

"Oh, Leonard! Leonard!"

"I said so. The Puritan!"

"The Puritan!" she exclaimed, the tears suspended on her glittering lashes. "Have I their intolerance, their cruelty, their vulgarity, their —"

“ You have their habit of thought, altered to the altered times. You are not the Puritan of the seventeenth century, but you are of the nineteenth. You are ready to cry because I won some money at cards ! ” and he laughed so gayly that she could not be angry.

“ I should not think you would care for the society of so disagreeable — ”

“ Hush ! hush ! ” he answered her. “ I allow no one to abuse my friends. ”

“ But, Leonard, about the cards ? You know how dangerous it is, how ruinous, how it destroys the very fibre of the mind — ”

“ To win money at cards ? Look here, Helena, if you gaze at me so charmingly as that I may make you a promise. And it would be a cruelty to exact it, for I play an excellent game. ”

She was so beautiful to him in her indignation that he cared nothing about the indignation.

When the college days were over, their triumphs had been Helena's as much as Leonard's. And then before settling to the

study of his profession, he went about the country a little, and at the end of it spent the time in Europe thought necessary. Travel elevates the point of view or enlarges its vision. Helena felt when Leonard returned that there was something about the masculine mind, whether inherent quality or long descended culture, that was beyond her feminine power. And yet she never seemed sweeter to Leonard than at that moment. There was a trifle of pensiveness about her, too, that was wonderfully attractive in one of as wanton spirits as hers often were; the melancholy droop of the long black lash touched the heart with a sort of pleasant pain.

But Leonard was out in the world now; he no longer spent every moment with Helena. He was pursuing his profession, and he was led hither and thither by the moment. He had an interest and a curiosity in everything — and sometimes it was a fact of science, and sometimes it was a pretty girl. If he followed the pretty girl as he would a show in the street, luring him on —

if to him she was only a picture, with some human interest added, but no interest of his own, how was Helena to know it? The melancholy droop of the lash became a droop of the lovely corners of the mouth as well. Leonard was hers, had always been hers. That another person should attract him seemed to her a robbery of her own identity. And apparently that yellow-haired Louisa Dane was attracting him with those sketching fingers of hers. The one defect in Leonard was that he had no love for music, and music was the passion of Helena's soul. On the other hand he had a fair talent with his pencil, and Louisa Dane knew how to drip the color from her brushes in a way that kindled the warmth of his admiration. As for Helena she could not draw a straight line or a crooked one. If Leonard wanted to stroll off sketching with Louisa Dane, he was free to do so; she had no right to prohibit it; all the more, Louisa Dane seemed to her a poor sort of thing. And if he forgot her in amusing himself, this dark foreigner, Giuseppe Maldoni, who had drifted to the

great county town and was giving music lessons there, knew how to beguile your soul out of your body; and the mornings Helena and Giuseppe spent together, with violin and piano and song, were full of nothing but music.

"What under heaven do you see in that swarthy son of thunder?" asked Leonard one day with vexation, meeting the Italian going out.

"All that you see in that 'daughter of the gods, divinely tall and most divinely fair,'" she replied: "a community of interest."

"What community of interest can I have with Louisa Dane?" he cried. "She is teaching me to mix my colors."

"And Giuseppe is teaching me how to move the world with diminished sevenths."

"Giuseppe, indeed! And since how long? Pshaw! A regular shibboleth. There seems to be a cant to every art. There is something sensual about music, Helena," he said, leaning back his head, with his hands clasped behind it, where he had thrown himself on the lounge. "Ani-

mals almost invariably recognize its power; its best ministers are people of limited intelligence; even idiots have been known —”

“Stop, stop, sir; it is like blasphemy! The one divine thing on earth, the one thing that lifts the soul to heaven, that solaces sorrow, that crowns joy —”

“There, there, there!” he cried, “or I shall think you have gone mad. It is a dialect, I suppose,” he added, reflectively.

“And there is no dialect or shibboleth in your and Louisa Dane’s talk about tones and technique and schools and morbidezza —”

“But you see we have the real things to show for it: we have tones or technique — or we haven’t.”

And then she laughed and began to warble “Una voce poco fa.”

“I dare say,” he said, “that you are doing that in a manner to move a stone, if it had an ear for music. That sort of thing always makes me remember a scene in a madhouse near a city on the French coast, where a fellow on a flute drew the maniacs

after him as Orpheus drew the brutes. A singular place it was—I must see it again some day—they had ideas there about the brain and its management.”

But Helena's light-hearted singing was due to her having just learned a secret of nature, and being suddenly convinced of the fact that this yellow-haired youth, with his clear gray eyes and Greek face, was not to find his complement in any girl as yellow-haired, as gray-eyed, as Greek-faced as himself. Perhaps he knew he was not in love with the pleasant girl who sketched with him: certainly what he did not know was that he was in love with the girl who sang with the Italian. She was going to teach him. She—she herself—had long known—and she stopped her singing and hid her crimson face between her hands.

What happened to her inner consciousness did not hinder Helena from practising the next morning with Giuseppe, from walking in the woods with him, and trying to note on paper the musical value of the susurrus of the pines and the tinkle of cat-

bird's song and bobolink's, of copying out for him certain exercises that he needed, of taking down the rich and sweet unwritten melodies of his land, of which he knew scores; of reading with him the treatises on counterpoint, canon and fugue. It was all very simple—why should Leonard disturb himself? But he did. "I can never have Helena a moment to myself!" he exclaimed to Helena's Aunt Jane.

"And why should you expect it?" said Aunt Jane. And at the glance he gave her, Aunt Jane, who had put brown paper on a thousand bumps for him, and given him tarts and puffs as liberally, and received all his childish confidences, who had saved him from countless punishments, and loved him as if he belonged to her, replied, "You look as if I were good enough to eat, and you meant to do it."

"I have found out—I have found out, Aunt Jane, what is the matter with me!" he cried, and laid his head in the good ample lap.

"Well, well, my dear boy," she said, with

her fingers on his clustering locks, "we all have a time to find that out. Thank goodness, if you don't find out anything worse. For, to save my soul, I can't make out what Helena means if she doesn't mean to marry this Italian."

"Marry him!" cried Leonard, in white amazement. "Why she can't. She is mine and I am hers, we — we — we have been as good as married ever since she was born."

"She'll cry salt tears for her folly yet," said Aunt Jane grimly — her customary volubility quenched in her own tears for the time. And Leonard went away on fire to his finger tips, and when Helena capped her enormities by going up on the noon train to the city on Saturday afternoon with Giuseppe, to hear Faust, the first person in the house that her eyes rested on was Leonard, white and radiant himself with the play of his passions. Nothing to him was all the light and shadow of that ideal drama of love, and youth, and joy, and grief; he saw none of it, he heard none of it, as he saw Helena grow ruddy or grow pale, smile

or weep with satisfaction in the song and the singer. And when he observed people wondering at her vivid Spanish effect, and heard them inquiring who she was, he ground his teeth with rage again to think she was subject to such remark and accompanied by Giuseppe.

“Leonard at the opera!” she said, as they brushed by him coming out. “Don’t tell me after this that the tonic sol-fa represents senseless hieroglyphics to you! Now, you are coming home with us.”

“Going home with you!” he exclaimed in the same suppressed tone and with flaming eyes. “How dare you speak to me so! I am never going home!”

“I think you will,” she said, with the smile that disclosed the little teeth like kernels of white corn in that sweet and wholesome mouth of hers. “For I will sing to you and the Signor the ‘Ave Maria’ and the ‘Jewel Song.’” She was making promises to vacancy, for Leonard was not there; but he had carried away her roses—her bunch of great yellow roses—in his hand.

He came, all the same, with the evening, although delaying till the church bells rang nine. Helena was alone, and there were no lights in the room other than those shed from the soft sea-coal fire; but that gleam illumined the deep claret tint of her velvet bodice and the gold flowered gauze scarf she wore, till she looked like a Venetian donzella waiting to be painted by Pordenone. She was waiting for Leonard only; she had been watching for him and pacing the floor in a suspense, lest she had gone too far, that was growing beyond her bearing, as turn after turn she stopped at the window and saw no shadow on the garden walk. And when he came in, as he always did, without knocking, she was standing just beside the door, and her arms were about his neck and their lips met together, and there was no more doubt or darkness between them.

“To think,” she said, by and by, “your being troubled about poor Giuseppe,—and his wife whom he adores, at home, with their six children!”

“Do not speak of it,” he shuddered. “It

is all too dreadful. Let me forget it. Or else I can hardly be glad of it as opening my eyes and giving you to me at last."

"And you didn't know you cared for me till I practised scales with a singing master?"

"Did you?"

"Why, I knew it always!" she said.

"I knew you were a part of me!" he cried. "I knew you were vital to me. I could not dream of existence without you. I cannot dream of existence without you now. I would not live one hour if you were out of the world. Oh, Helena, my love, how awful it is that one person staying can make life heaven or hell, and going can eclipse the sun itself!"

"And would my going eclipse the sun?" she asked archly. "Are you so different from other men that no other woman could console you?"

"I am different from other men. For me there is but one woman in the world; the rest are shadows. I never thought what it would be to love you before; you have

seemed, without thinking, so inseparable from myself and my life. Helena, I don't know but I was happier before I was happy; happier in my unconscious content." But with her head upon his breast, and her eyes gazing up at him—eyes purple-dark as the velvet of a heartsease petal, he knew that words were all in vain, that he was absorbingly and tumultuously happy now, and that he must make the most of it, for life was too long for such bliss to last.

And Helena—she kept feeling that now it was time to die—all other moments in life would seem pale and thin beside these supreme ones. "How beautiful you are!" he cried. "Your eyes have a light in them that does not belong to earth, and your smile is only the expression of an inner beauty —"

"Hush, hush!" she said. "You never used to speak to me so."

"And perhaps I never shall again. I seem never to have seen or thought of it before. But it is not for your beauty that I

love you. It would be all the same with me if you were scarred and marred. But I must speak now; this once I must lay my soul bare and let you know how precious you are to me. I must look at it myself. I never knew it till this year began. Singular phenomenon — this love — it is a burden, it is a dolor, but oh, what unspeakably delicious dolor!”

And the maiden to whom this fervid love was tendered slept upon the clouds by night, and seemed to walk a track of sunbeams into heaven itself by day. All things shared her happiness; the people in the house and on the street; the postman or the tramp; it was never cloudy weather when she flung that smile across their way. It seemed good to staid old folk whose heyday was long over, like Aunt Annabel or Aunt Betty, to see such irradiating bliss in the world; and it was good for all who crossed her path. She wanted them to be glad of her gladness, and she pitied them so much to think they could not have that gladness for their own that she could not do enough for them.

The lovers would probably have been married at once, had not the death of Helena's uncle, with whom she had always lived, and the discovery of his insolvent estate, leaving her the three aunts with no one but herself on whom to rely, necessarily postponed matters a little. She made arrangements at once to take the scholars left after Signor Giuseppe's departure, and she played the organ for an early church and received a salary for singing in the choir of a later one. And she stipulated before she married to be allowed to continue this course. But what a sweetness that year's engagement added to her life! When she was used to remember it afterward it seemed only like one long, bright summer's day.

Yet sweet as that was, the married life was sweeter. Leonard prospered in his profession; and the goodness of two or three grateful patients, who died at last, gave him the means to buy Crag's nest, a small estate upon the mountain side which they had long coveted. It was a trifle too far away from the town for a physician's convenience;

but he had his office hours in town, and had succeeded so well that he could afford indifference as to the accessibility of his house. What pleasure they had in beautifying the place! Every rose they planted, they planted together. "Their blossoms will seem to be your breath," he said.

Over all towered the dark forest of pines. "I will never have one of them cut down," he said. "We have sat beneath them so much that they have fed and grown great on our happiness; something of you has gone into them, Helena. When we are apart I always feel you there as I see the stars shining through them. There shall be no change here so long as you are the pole star of my being."

"But the earth swings to new pole stars," she said mischievously, and then repenting the mischief.

They had the satisfaction of children in arranging the interior of the house, also; this room looked out upon a purple mountain view; it should be fitted in old-gold, and the tiles around the fireplace should

be done in the massed petals of deepest crimson roses. This room opened on the rushing brook and its still, deep pool, like a bit of fallen sky; its colors, lighted with crystals, should be the cool blues that doubted if they were not greens, like *Æn*id's

“Splendid silk of foreign looms
Where like a shoaling sea the lovely blue
Played into green.”

This room, leading into the study, should be full of flowers and gay with summer chintz; and the library should have the velvet, mossy shadows of sunlit woods. The aunts were coming to live with them, the aunts whom Leonard loved as much as she did; and Helena clasped her hands in joy a hundred times a day to think what a home it was, and how perfect the days would be in it. They hung the pictures together—chiefly Leonard's water colors—lifting and lowering them and standing back and admiring them and each other; and they set up their books and arranged the details of their housekeeping plans, all in Leonard's

spare moments ; and there was not, speaking loosely, a particle of dust in the house that had not connected with it some association, some romance, some fact of their lives for both of them. The day that they moved in was almost as much to Helena as the day when, crying and laughing together, her face like sun and rainbows and April showers, she had kissed her aunts and gone away, having become in law that part of Leonard which she had always been in fact. "To walk to the end of the world together," he said.

She sat on the doorstep one night, years afterward, looking down the blue mist of the gorge that a long beam was just lighting with its dusty gold, and life seemed to her to stretch away like an endless path among the islands of the blest. What a union was hers and Leonard's, she mused. They read the same books together, and re-read the 'old ones ; they almost thought the same thoughts together ; they grew more alike each day ; they had dropped the old quarrels about matters remote as the

Puritans, possibly for new ones ; but where they differed, the difference only brightened their lives with gayety. Yet they had had their troubles together ; at first some effort to make both ends meet, some amazement to Helena to find her husband mortal enough to like his soup clear and his coffee hot, some revelation to Leonard that Helena had a temper of her own ; and then the patients had been a nuisance to her, she had hated them all — especially the women who adored and confided in their doctor — but not half so much a nuisance as the music was to him, music that filled his house with clatter and stole his wife away every Sunday. And in these years, too, Helena had gone down between the gates of death, and as her husband bent beside her in her recovery, she realized afresh what she was to him, and how the breath of his life hung upon hers. “ They are beautiful,” he said of his children ; “ they are you, they are me, they are their own fresh new beings, the spark of whose life was our love. But they are nothing to me beside you, my darling.” But when they died she thought

his heart would break. She herself felt as he had thought he should feel—a tender grief, a perfect love, a trust in the hand that gave them and reclaimed them; but Leonard was spared, and having Leonard she had all. And there was, moreover, a certain ecstasy in her sorrow, with the thought of what it meant to have children in heaven. “It is a sacrament,” she said to Leonard. “We had them, God has them; God and we, and no others enter into it. It is a positive and actual breaking of sacramental bread. And oh, my darling!” she would cry, throwing her arms about him, “since I have you —”

But as time went on, and no other children came, she saw that it was a grief to Leonard, an increasing grief. He loved other people’s children, and longed for his own. And she was content with only him. Yet for any and every drawback, what a perfect home theirs had been; what generous hospitality had reigned within its open doors; how the poor knew its gates as the birds do the branching trees; what cheerfulness and

sweetness, and gay, bright social life and love of man dwelt there ! Once in a while, it is true, Helena had a smouldering mood that blazed out when she suspected some woman of making sickness a pretence for the comfort of the doctor's presence, and wrathfully forbade him ever to bring that woman into the house — ending always by carrying her, herself, all manners of dainties by day, and sitting up with her at night. Yes, on the whole, an almost perfect home — and no two days alike in it.

Leonard came and sat beside her as the purple began to wipe out the gold in the mist of the gorge below and a pale star trembled upon the upper air. "Ah, what a beautiful world it is !" she sighed.

"Because you are in it," he answered her, lightly.

"Do you really think so still," she said, "when we have been married eight years, and after all my tempers ?"

"I shall think so forever ! You are to me lovelier than the day I married you — a closer part of the fibre of my inmost being."

"I think I believe you," she said, half shyly. "I think if I were to die you are the one man in the world who would not marry again."

"Marry again!" he cried, drawing her toward him fervently. "When I so detest second marriages that I hold them allowable only as evidence that the first was no marriage at all? And I, who have been your husband, profane your memory by putting another woman in your place! Thank heaven, there are some things that are impossible!" And she returned his embrace as fervently.

"And I should not live to marry again," he said. "If grief did not kill me, there are quieting potions that would. What should I have to live for? How could I survive the loss of half myself—half myself from the day of your birth, and for eight years the very breath of my being! Not even death could divorce two lives knit like ours!"

She had become so used to such asseverations that I doubt if she would not have felt

a little wronged and defrauded had he failed to make it as emphatic. As it was, for some subtle reason, it only filled her with a deep and quiet satisfaction. "I pray that we may go together," she cried, clinging to him closely. To her he was the best, the greatest, the loftiest man alive. He had something of the largeness of the gods to their worshippers; something, too, of the helplessness of the child to its mother. She knew that her flashes and blazes and singing spells were only a succession of new experiences to him that gave her something of Cleopatra's swiftest charm. She wondered why he was not more moved by that marvellous voice of hers, the inmost sweetness of whose tones had a thrill that moved other men to tears. But then in turn she could not stand spellbound before the operations where his surgeon's knife wrought wonders; —and her voice was but a pleasure of the senses, she said, while his skill was the salvation of a life. She did not often let him see her in such tender mood as this; she would have died for him if it would have done him

any good; she would have died with him any day he asked it.

She had a chance presently.

They had gone down to the seaside for a week's change, as, when his duties allowed him, they sometimes did. For he had periods of such absorption in his work that he came out of it all half wrecked and needing rest. He was living a great life, beginning the making of a great name. And standing with many as a sort of vicegerent of the powers of health and strength, it sometimes seemed to himself, in his rapt study, that he was on the verge of discovering mighty secrets of the powers of life and death. It seemed so to Helena, too.

The day was a perfect one, with now and then a capful of wind blowing out of the little round clouds that swelled up over the horizon like bubbles.

"Will you go out with me?" asked Helena.

"With all these flaws?" he asked.

"Just as you please. Then I will go alone."

"Alone! What in heaven's name could you do alone?"

"I fancy," she said, the laugh brightening all the rich color in her cheek, "I could drown, in order that you should blow the fresh breath of life into me with all your occult powers!"

"Life would be much more comfortable, Helena, if there were something in it you were afraid of. Well, here we go," and he gathered up his lazy length and reached his hat. "If we drown, it is your fault."

"It doesn't much matter about drowning, though," she said, swinging her hat as they went along the shingle, and unaware that she spoke in other than a matter-of-fact-way, "if we drown together."

"Are you so indifferent to life—in such a hurry to be through—"

"Oh, no, no, never! But it is all so blest that I am half the time afraid something will happen."

"But the worst that could happen is death, and —"

"No, indeed; the worst that could hap-

pen would be that you might look at some other woman!" and then they both laughed, knowing well the habit of her jealous pangs, and ran along to the boat, it signifying little that neither of them knew much about a boat, and that they were running before the wind directly in the track of the sea-going steamers.

"Could anything be more perfect?" said Helena, half recumbent in the stern, sea and sky making a sapphire and lapis ring about her. "We seem to be alone in this great hollow shell of the sea and sky. It is like our old lover days over again."

"Only better," he answered her.

"Only better," she repeated.

"We must come out at night, with the sea and the stars, and the freedom of the universe, alone together." And as they sailed he told her histories of the old craft that had ploughed these waters — fire ships and phantom ships — and recited to her verses of his own inditing, for now and then he turned off a little song as perfect as a pearl.

"That is the strangest thing," she said, "that you, who don't know what music is, should have the writing of such verses, and I, who am music's confidante, cannot write a melody."

"You are a melody," he said. And just at that instant there was a roar, a rush, a ringing of bells that sounded in their ears like gongs, wild cries, a vast black bulk towering over them, a crash, a sweep of many waters, and then nothingness.

Half an hour afterward a fisherman found a broken boat afloat bottom side up, and a man entangled in the rigging, his head above the water, unconscious, but alive. Trimming his sail speedily, he took the half-drowned man ashore. And after the sickness and delirium of weeks, as wretched and desolate a man as walked the earth, Leonard Vance took up his colorless life, alone, as he said, till the sea gave up its dead. For Helena was never found. I scraped the moss away, the other day, from a stone set up as a memorial without a grave, and overgrown with bramble roses, to read the name upon it:

HELENA VANCE.

Lost at Sea.

Aged 28.

To the happy, half a score of years may pass like a dream in the night. They may pass like a dream in the night, too, to those who are simply unaware of their lapse, as a woman lying helpless and speechless in a large hospital for the insane, near a town on the French coast, could hardly fail to be. She had been brought there by the captain of a French steamer, who had picked her up at sea,—pitying passengers having subscribed a sum of money for her comfort. He knew nothing about her; the injury to her skull—for she had been, perhaps, dragged the whole length of the keel and hurt by the propeller—had already made her insensible before the apoplexy of drowning took place, and although, when drawn on board the steamer, she was found, after long effort, to be living, she had no language and no consciousness. The fine texture of the fragments left of the garments torn and cut and

wrenched away indicated comfortable circumstances; but no name was to be found on any of the remaining portions. Yet one could hardly look at her and not imagine her to have been a person of singular refinement, as she evidently still was of singular attraction — dark and shapely, with chiselled features and a wealth of night-black hair. The captain, who left her at the hospital on landing, had intended to insert advertisements respecting her in the American newspapers, but whether he did so or not no one knew, as he was himself lost at sea on the return voyage.

And so she had remained where he had left her, her case exciting some interest among surgeons. The fracture of the skull had long been reduced, and it was thought that a slow absorption would relieve the brain of pressure, and in time restore the patient to herself and so to her friends. She had gradually waked from her stupor, and given faint glimmers of reason, and become more and more intelligent, although so slowly that one recognized it only by comparison with

the past. When at last she spoke, it was in French. Whether that was her native tongue was doubtful, from a certain peculiarity of pronunciation. It was possible she had learned it as a child learns its mother tongue, hearing it spoken about her; but, on the other hand, if she belonged, as her dark, rich color seemed to say, to the southern provinces, that would account for the peculiarity. In the eighth year of her stay, however, she, once in a while, said something in a foreign tongue, German, perhaps, or English. The case was inexplicable. Some months later she seemed to be full of perplexing thoughts, of melancholy memories, of doubt and wonder; she obtained from the attendants all that they knew about herself; but she said nothing in reply, as if uncertain whether she dreamed or waked. The physicians regarded it as an unfavorable symptom that she became very sad. One day she was heard humming an Italian air full of fioriture; she wept afterward, she could not have told you why. And then she soothed a demented child by

singing to him softly all the morning. The attendants got in the way of asking her to sing whenever the wards were noisy, and she always brought quiet—an old official of the place used to do the same thing with his flute, they said. Once when a dangerous and murderous maniac had broken loose and was dealing havoc on his way, she astonished everybody within the walls by walking coolly toward him and bursting into a triumphal song, full throated, resounding, sweet to the soul's satisfaction, till the maniac crept to her feet and allowed the attendants to secure him. But after that she seemed more bewildered and sad than before.

One morning, in the tenth year of her stay, wrapped in her long cloak and big blue hood, and walking in the grounds, of which she had long had the liberty, she suddenly threw up her hands, uttering a loud cry, "I have it all! I have it all!" slipped through the gate and was gone. The clot was absorbed at last; the cure was complete.

Possibly it was the same woman who

shipped that night on an outward-bound vessel as stewardess, took her wages in the American port, purchased fresh undergarments with a feverish haste, and bought a railway ticket for the town where Helena Vance was born and had lived her happy life.

How slow was the train ! No lively tune could its motion make in her mind ; the wheels clamored and clattered only to the movement of a funeral march. She could neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep. Ten years ! It was an eternity ! Would they be alive — Leonard — the dear old aunts ? Who had taken care of the poor things in all these years ? How they must have missed her, their darling ! How he must have missed her, his other self ! Robbed of ten years of happiness, condemned to ten years of solitude and suffering — if, indeed, he had not himself found the refuge he had always looked for in her loss, the refuge of the grave. How she would work to atone to him, to make him happy, in all their remaining years, with a redoubled hap-

piness, as if the whole tide, that should have belonged to the years that were lost in that black gap of unconsciousness, flowed back with ten times repeated strength and depth. Oh, if he only lived! She longed unspeakably once more to feel his arms about her, his kisses on her mouth; to look into his eyes and to hear his voice. Ten years could not have changed him so much; they had hardly changed her at all, with that long slumber of the brain. And once more to have that shelter, that support, that care, that worship! Her heart beat so it choked her; she trembled with eagerness, with fear, with hope, with joy. And yet—if she—should—meet Leonard with a smile on his face—

Five o'clock of a gray afternoon, when a woman in a long cloak and a blue hood that nearly hid her face walked slowly up the hillside to Cragshole as if the throbbing of her heart made it barely possible to move.

The place had changed a little. The house and gardens were the same—yes, there were the roses. “Their blossoms will

seem to be your breath," he had said. Somebody cared for them then. "Oh, roses, what happiness you witnessed once; what happiness you shall again!" she said. But still there was a change — yes, it was the wilderness of trees above and below that were being cut away, and piles of cord-wood and great logs made a confusion of the place, as if, instead of being a finished home a century old, it were a new clearing in the forest. It made her shake a little, as her eyes wandered up and down; she felt as if that would not happen if Leonard lived there still; the spot should be sacred to him with memory of her. What was it he had once said? "There shall be no change here so long as you are the pole star of my being." What was it she had answered him? "The earth swings to new pole stars!"

She went round to a door in the gable, tottering at last, and leaning on the jamb a moment; she pulled her big hood about her face, and knocked and went into a room where three old ladies sat.

Nothing in the room had been moved

from its original place — paper and pictures and carpets were only a little faded — that was all. A pale old woman slumbered in her chair in the hebetude of age, from which she seldom waked; one read a novel in a state of bland contentment and well-being; and one, the lively little bustling Aunt Jane, was busy with a work basket and humming pleasantly to herself the while. If the three had missed their niece in the beginning, they were reconciled by this, and lived a happy, easy life, cared for in sufficient comfort, evidently.

“Let you rest?” chirruped Aunt Jane. “To be sure, my good woman. Take the rocking chair. You see, this is the house of rest,” glancing at her sisters. “Are you going far?”

“Not far,” was the low reply.

“From the neighborhood here?”

“I used to live here once, long ago, long ago.”

“Ah, indeed,” said Aunt Jane, viewing on her stretched fingers the hole she was to darn. “Then you find the place changed, I suppose.”

“Oh, yes — oh, yes.”

“Well, it is changed. And it’s a pity, too. But they have been cutting down the trees ever since Leonard married again. He found it profitable, and having two families to support —”

“Is — is — is Leonard married again?” How the voice shook! It was only a ghastly whisper.

“You knew him, then? Oh, yes, long since. Let’s see — five years, I think. His son is quite a lad. He —”

“And he is the one that would not live if his wife died!” said the other, with a sudden hysterical laugh that made Aunt Betty look up from the pages of her novel. And then the world was going out — it was all black — it was going out — No, no; she must not, she would not, lose her self-control!

Aunt Jane’s needle was suspended in the air a moment with surprise, and then, slow to take offence or imagine evil, she answered, even although to unheeding ears: “Yes, I see you knew him pretty well. But he

mourned her enough. He mourned her enough. And then, you see, he was a man. I can't say anything—we couldn't, you see. He takes care of us. And he had a right to marry."

There was a gasp, as if the other tried in vain to speak, or had repeated the words before the sound came to fill them. "Did he—did he—marry Louisa Dane?"

"Louisa Dane, indeed! He married a little pale, thin woman that he met in the cars, sick and weak, with air cushions and rugs and hot water bottles. And there was a great accident, and this miserable little creature who could not take care of herself began to take care of everybody else. And he's a doctor, you know. And it rather fetched him," said poor Aunt Jane, unconscious of her slang. "It made him fond of her, and by and by—he was so sad and solitary—he went and brought her home. He didn't undertake to bring her here," said Aunt Jane, emphatically. "He isn't the same Leonard. But they seem happy. And, as I said, they have a little lad."

"The little lad," murmured a voice of infinite sadness.

"And Leonard was always so fond of children. But for my part," snapped Aunt Jane, "I always think there's a good deal of make-believe about that sort of sick person — can't button her own boots one year, and a competent housekeeper the next! Yes, Leonard is married again, and very comfortable. Where does he live?" guessing rather than hearing the words. "Down town near the post office. But he comes up once a month or so to settle accounts and give directions. He keeps his old study here, and he always comes in at the end gate and goes in there, and comes out to see us by and by," continued the garrulous old soul, for the visitor allowed her to run on.

She was pulling herself together now. The shock was vast. Her brain seemed to reel, as if she put forth all her strength to save herself in the fall down a black and unknown chasm. Only now a grim fancy crossed her of Leonard shut in the town, getting all the small ways of the townspeople,

living cheaply, with closed doors, interested in the small gossip, small pleasures, small pursuits of the town, forgetting the old studies, the search into veiled secrets of science, the great name once possible, the fame half reached. And their life up on the hill had been so free and fine. And it was dust and ashes! Ah! why had some fire from heaven not fallen and reduced the place itself to the same ashes that its life had found! For herself —

She must not think of herself yet — that would come by and by; that would come in the terrible days and nights when the black waves rose around her, and one wave tossed to another, and a blacker storm, to be followed by as black a calm, raged within.

She sat very still in the chair. She was trying to bring some order from the confusion, to stop this bell that was tolling the one word in her ear like a death knell. Leonard was married again. To a little delicate woman. She made his home agreeable to him; she had no temper, no caprices, no gay rout of friends — and there was no

music. Doubtless his dinners were always nicely cooked, his clothes in perfect order. And he was very comfortable ; yes, vastly more comfortable than he had ever been before. There were no discussions, no differing views, no quarrels — he had a reverential feeling for this good and placid, delicate white woman. And there was the little lad.

What was there left for herself but the effacement that fate had given her?

Yet if she could see him once again ! Perhaps she would better not. She might betray herself. It would be harder still. Now she could go as she came. She could make the sacrifice. She was sure of herself. But should she see his eyes —

“ I declare ! ” said Aunt Jane. “ That’s Leonard now, coming in the gate. And Bridget’s dusting the study — she was late in her sweeping to-day — and not half through.”

“ I will go in, then, if you please. I know the way. I came to speak with him,” said the other, and she called all her forces and rose.

“Well, if you would just as lief. My ankle’s lame, and I rather favor it,” said Aunt Jane, looking after her, as she groped her way rather than walked. “Just Helena’s height, poor girl!” said Aunt Jane as the door closed, “and there was something in her voice like Helena’s too. Didn’t know he had a down town office, I suppose; and she does seem weak. I declare I don’t see how Annabel wears such holes in her stockings and she never setting her foot to the ground! I wonder if it can be possible that Bridget wears them herself the odd week.”

The study opened from the flower room, empty now, but once a bright little spot of gay chintzes, and roses and oleanders and palms and camelias. It seemed as if Bridget were never coming out. Any one might hear this heart beat like the hammers of a forge. It would be dark presently, and she must be going. Not once did she think of breaking off that marriage. If he could make it, he could keep it. Perhaps he was happier so; she would not add to his troubles by re-appearing on the scene. And then there was

the little lad. She sank upon the seat in the lonely place, and her arms fell straight across her knees, with her head between them. It was despair. That little lad was the keenest blow of all — he must needs love his own child — and it was hers, that other woman's! Ah, how cruel was fate, was nature, was God! There was nothing for her but obliteration, annihilation of all that made life.

Dimly under all the pang was a feeling that she would like to see that little lad.

At last Bridget went out by the door into the garden, and so away. There was a movement of a chair drawn to a table, of a curtain pushed up for light. She was hardly acting with volition now, but as if necessity had taken hold of her. She dropped her hood and noiselessly stole into the study, where lay the last western light, for Leonard's back was turned, and she fell upon a chair that would be opposite him when he should turn again. He slightly wheeled his chair about on the pivot, still looking at the paper in his hand. How grave he was;

how pale; how still. All the old fire had gone, all the old light and laughter. He was silent, full of reserve, contented, it might be, but with gaps of bitter memories, one would say. And beautiful—beautiful as even in his proudest youth! Giving his life in small ways to others now—what better could she herself do! Perhaps she had no blame for him—but she had lost him—he had gone away from her forever, forever!

She moved, her profile lying half to the light that came full upon it; the rustle made him glance up. For a moment—a thrill, a throb—he gazed on her, stone still, as if a cataclysm had struck him dumb. And then he sprang to his feet and started back in a kind of horror.

“Helena!” he cried in a voice of agony.

She, too, stood up. He was holding out his arms to her with a great sob. It seemed as if a wind blew her into them. But as his head bent, she turned even her cheek away. “At least,” he said, “at least I may take you in my arms again!” And as suddenly

and impetuously he released her, walking to the window. When he turned she was gone.

"We have seen a ghost," said Aunt Jane, that midnight, after all the quiet search. But I think that Leonard Vance knew whether he had seen a ghost or not.

Three weeks from the day she slipped through the asylum gates near the city on the French coast, the woman in the long cloak and blue hood walked in again—if it were the same woman. Her long, black hair was as white as if ashes had been sifted over it. Ashes had been sifted over it—the ashes of a dead happiness. I have met with nothing more concerning her, unless the subjoined paragraph in a foreign journal had reference to her in her life of effacement:

At the conflagration occurring last week in the Asylum of Our Lady of the Suffering Heart, the loss of life would have been appalling but for the presence of mind of one of the attendants. It seems that when the fire broke out the wildest panic seized the unfortunate inmates, and all would inevitably have perished in the

flames had not this attendant of whom we speak suddenly begun to sing. Her clear soprano voice — a voice that seemed, to those assisting at the prodigious spectacle, sweeter than anything ever heard on earth — rose over the stupendous uproar, as the singer stood quite still in the centre of the main hall, with the roof ready to fall in, till the wretched people had gathered about her, when, still singing, she quietly led them out into safety. Whether this attendant is some retired prima donna assoluta with a history, or whether merely a simple person caring for the insane, is not known. But she is to be placed at once in a responsible position at the head of the female wards of the new asylum, in the performance of the sad duties to which she has devoted her life.

But it has seemed to me that in the career of this simple country doctor there was something more than the sorrow of a man who had lost the wife of his youth and had by and by married again — there was a tragedy as if the stars had crashed together and extinguished the light of heaven.

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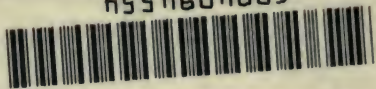
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